20 gory bigshots of history come back by Vita Ray

NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢

THE HOUND
Fritz Leiber

—

FRANK OWEN

—

D. H. KELLER

"Nursemaid to Nightmares

He bathed a werewolf, fed a vampire, amused a mermaid, groomed a centaur

ROBERT BLOCH

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ITCHY SCALP?

UGLY SCALES?

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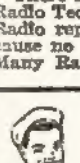
J. E. SMITH, *President*
Dept. 2KM, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.



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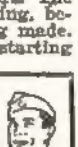

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ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1942 Cover by Richard Bennett

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Julius Margate collects horrors the way some people collect stamps

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental

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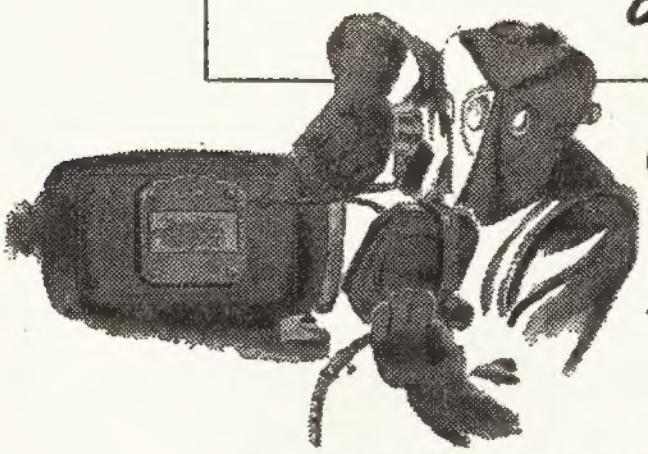
D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

The Memory of an Atom



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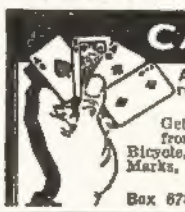

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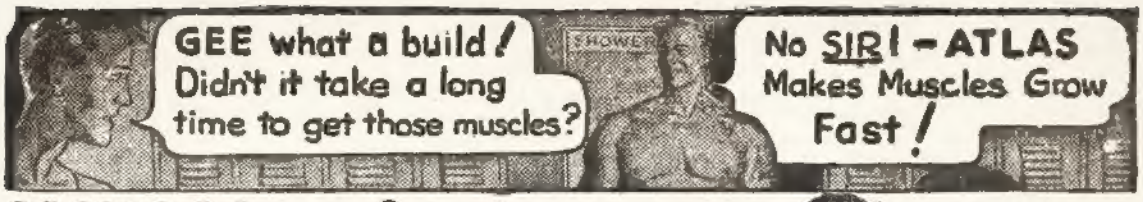

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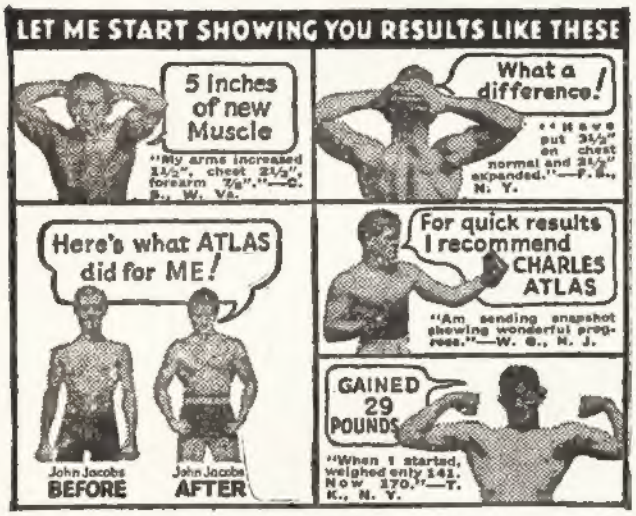

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Nursemaid to Nightmares

1. A Very Odd Job

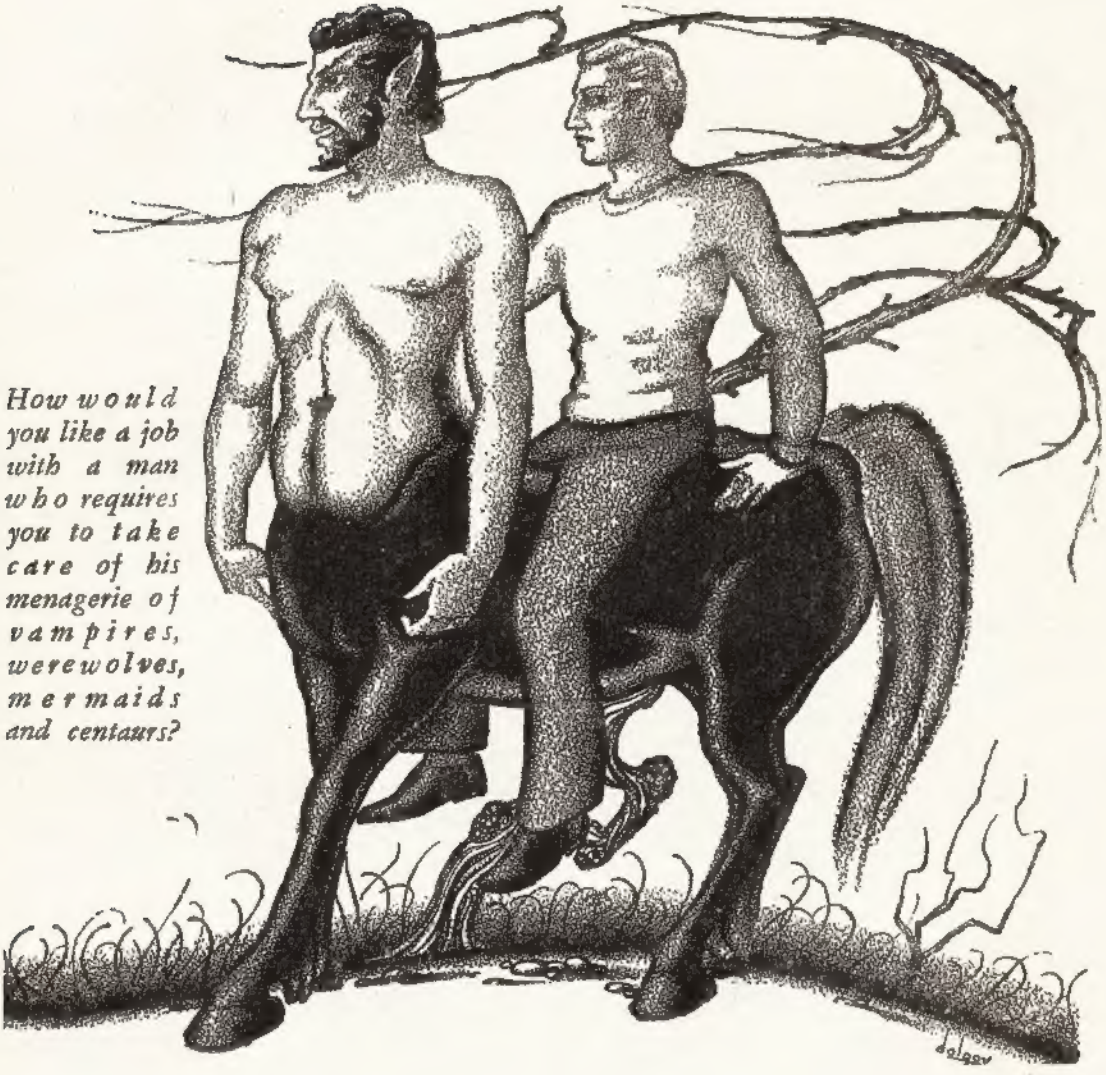
THE man at the employment agency gave me a long look.

"Why do you keep coming back?" he muttered, wearily. "There's nothing for you. I've told you that a dozen times."

I lost my patience.

"What's wrong with me?" I snapped. "I've done everything the books advise. Look at me—my shoes are shined. My trousers are worn but neatly pressed. I haven't got unsightly pores, or dandruff or five o'clock shadow. I use a deodorant. My fingernails are clean."

By ROBERT BLOCH



How would you like a job with a man who requires you to take care of his menagerie of vampires, werewolves, mermaids and centaurs?

Despite himself, I could see that he was impressed. I pursued my advantage.

"I smile pleasantly, don't I? My handclasp is firm, isn't it? Look!" As a crowning gesture I produced a handkerchief and waved it under his nose. "See?" I exclaimed, triumphantly. "No tattle-tale gray."

The employment man sat up and then shrugged.

"I know all that," he conceded. "You come up to all the specifications except one, as far as a job is concerned."

"And what's that?" I asked.

"You can't *do* anything."

I kept still. I knew he had me there.

"Listen, Mister," he said, patiently. "Your card says you're a writer. And we just don't get any calls for writers. Now if you could only do something useful—like plumbing, for instance. Or if you were an arc-welder. Lots of calls for arc-welders.

"But no. You're useless. All you can do is write." A slight sneer crossed his face. "Can't even operate a lathe," he accused.

I bowed my head. It was true, I couldn't operate a lathe.

"But I can type," I suggested, desperately. "You surely must get plenty of calls for a stenographer."

He grunted. "Wouldn't you look cute now, sitting on a business man's lap?"

"Never thought of that."

He rose from his desk. "So you see how it is. You're just not the type. Too puny for outdoor work or the army. Haven't got a chance in a factory. My advice to you is to go back home and start pounding the typewriter again."

I faced him and bowed.

"A very excellent suggestion," I agreed. "But there are one or two slight difficulties. To begin with, as of this morning I no longer have a home. Nor a typewriter. My landlady is in possession of both."

The employment man sighed sympathetically. "Sure tough. There must be some way out. Wonder what I'd do if I were in your shoes."

"Have them re-soled, probably," I told him. "My feet are touching the pavement."

"Must be something," he muttered, scratching his head. "Writer, huh? Inside work. Hey—maybe I've got it!"

He faced me across the desk and his voice dropped.

"Would you mind going to work for a screwball?" he asked.

"What do you mean, a lunatic?"

"No. Of course not. Why this guy is a millionaire. He's just kind of eccentric."

"You mean that if he were poor he'd be crazy."

"What do you care? A job's a job, and this is a good berth, if you fill the bill. Ever hear of Julius Margate?"

"No."

"Lives uptown. In a mansion, no less! I've checked. He called in last week—let me see now, if I can find the order." He bustled around opening a card file.

"Here it is. Yes, Julius Margate. He wants a house man. $200 a month, plus room and board."

$200 a month and keep for such a job? He must be whacky!" I exclaimed.

"Wait. Listen to this. Man selected must be fond of animals, able to climb trees, a good horseman; must have Type C blood and an I. Q. of 180 or higher."

He looked at me.

"Well?"

I SMILED. "Happen to know my blood type is okay," I answered. "Got a transfusion once. I've got an I. Q. record lying around that I think I can get my hands on. I haven't climbed a tree for ten years, but I guess I can manage. I used to ride pretty well. I'm not fond of animals—but for $200 a month and keep I'll sleep with a rhinoceros."

"Maybe you'll do at that," commented the employment man. "I'll call up Margate and see what he says. Drop back this afternoon around two."

"Doesn't he want me to go out there for an interview?"

"No. Told you he sounded like a screwball. Insists on phone interviews only. Says when he selects a man he'll send a guide down to take you to his place."

I let it go at that.

Promptly at two I returned. The employment agent was waiting for me. He

ushered me into the private office at once.

"You've got the job," he informed me. "And you start today. Your things will be called for. All ready to go?"

"Suits me."

"Sign here. Usual commission."

I signed.

"What about that guide?" I asked.

"He's waiting for you now in the outer office."

I paused. "I didn't see anyone there," I objected. "That is, nobody but a blind man."

"He's your guide," the employment agent told me. "I warned you Margate was a screwball."

We went back to the outer office. The fat blind man with the striped cane rose as we entered.

"Here he is," said the employment man. He introduced me. "And this is Captain Hollis."

"Pleased to meet up with you." The captain's voice was a jovial boom. He grasped my hand, held it. "Sure we'll get along fine. Boss ought to like you. You got long fingers. Like eels. Artistic, ain't you?"

"Writer," I admitted.

"Well ain't that swell, dammit! Boss likes writers. Thinks they're just too stinking intellecshool. He's pretty intellecshool himself. But let's heave anchor. The car's outside."

We left the building. Captain Hollis led the way, cane and all. He moved with marvelous celerity for a sightless man. He found the elevators and his cane pressed the *down* button with unerring accuracy.

He threaded his way through the outer lobby, using his cane for a needle. And once in the street, he walked directly toward a large gray limousine which stood resplendently defying the car shortage at the curb.

A uniformed chauffeur opened the door.

"This is Dave," the captain told me.

"Pleased to meet you," I said, climbing in.

"He's deaf." The captain thrust his face forward and his lips moved, repeating my name and greeting.

Dave smiled. "Glad you're with us. The Boss is gonna like you, I guess. You wear glasses. I'll bet you read a lot."

The limousine moved out into the traffic as we sat back. I turned to Captain Hollis.

"How about giving me a few tips on my new employer?" I asked. "He seems to be a most remarkable man."

"Who, the Boss? Listen, remarkable ain't the word for that guy. Some people might think he was a little balmy, but they just don't understand him. Kindest man in the world. Big hearted? Why, he loves everybody. He loves people you and I wouldn't put up with in a nightmare."

The captain shivered slightly. It was a startling phenomenom in so large a man.

"Not that I'm saying a word against the house-guests, you understand. They're all nice, decent folks in their way. But what a way!"

He shivered again.

"That's why I'm glad you're taking this job. I've been helping the Boss out around the house. It isn't easy for me, without my lights to guide me, and besides I can't seem to get used to them guests of his. Even if I went and brought a couple of them in the first place. I remember snagging Jory in Hungary. Before the war, that was. Dammit, there was a voyage! But—"

"I don't understand. What about Mr. Margate's guests? Who are they?"

The captain ignored my questions as he leaned forward suddenly to address Dave.

"Wait a minute! I nearly forgot something. Jory wants some flea powder. Better stop at the pet shop on our way up!"

Dave read his lips and nodded. A moment later the car turned in at the curb.

"You go in and get it," ordered the

captain. "Here's the money. A large can of flea powder."

I DID. It was my first act in the service of Julius Margate and I was oddly disappointed. After all this build-up I expected something better than buying a can of flea powder for a guest's poodle.

When I returned to the car, the captain was already issuing a further order to Dave.

"Dammit, I'm losing my memory!" he growled. "We got to stop by the dentist for Mr. Simpkins."

Obediently, the car moved forward. The captain turned to me. "You'll like old Simpkins," he predicted. "He's the best of the gang. Easiest to get along with, I think. Of course Simpkins isn't his real name. Talks with an accent. But the Boss doesn't care about a guy's past if he's working on the level now."

The captain chuckled. "Poor Simpkins kind of over-stepped himself, though. That's why the Boss made him go to the dentist today. It puts an end to all chances of accident."

His fingers went to my wrist.

"What time does your watch say?"

"Almost five."

"Is it dark yet?" His sightless eyes blinked.

"Yes."

"Good. Simpkins will be out. He was asleep when I brought him down. Lugged him up myself. He ought to be awake now. And will he be mad when he finds out what the dentist did!"

Again the captain chuckled.

The car moved in once more.

Dave turned his head from the wheel.

"There he is, waiting at the curb," he indicated.

"Does he look mad?"

"Boiling."

We pulled up.

I saw a tall, thin, middle-aged man with thinning hair. He *did* look mad—his eyes, anyway. The rest of his face was covered by his cupped hands.

"Hello, Mr. Simpkins," boomed the captain. "Climb in. Meet the new house man."

He introduced me.

Tall Mr. Simpkins entered with a grunt. His black coat covered the seat beside me as he extended a bony hand. I grasped it, but not for long. It was icy cold.

"Gratified, I'm sure," said Mr. Simpkins, in a burring voice. "You will excuse me. I am very upset."

His hand went back to his jaw as he turned to the captain.

"That was a very bad thing you did to me," he accused. "Taking me to the dentist while I am asleep."

"Boss' orders."

"Ah! I thought so. He is a hard man, Julius Margate. Do you know what he had the dentist do to me?"

"What?"

"He pulled all my teeth! When I woke up a few minutes ago I was lying in the chair and my teeth were gone. All of them!"

Captain Hollis began to laugh.

"Dammit, that's rich! Beg your pardon, Mr. Simpkins, but that's rich!" The captain turned to me. "Don't you think so?"

"I don't understand," I answered. "What's so funny about pulling out all of a man's teeth when he's asleep?"

It was Simpkins who answered, sulkily.

"It isn't funny at all. Losing my teeth is the worst thing in the world that could happen to me. Because," continued Mr. Simpkins, in a dismal voice, "I happen to be a vampire."

2. *The Perfect Host*

CAPTAIN HOLLIS was a very strong man.

I discovered this when I tried to jump out of the car.

Mr. Simpkins was almost as upset as I was.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered. "I won't hurt you. My teeth are all gone, anyway. I couldn't bite you if I wanted to."

His bony hand pressed my shoulder. I winced.

"Honestly," he pleaded. "I never bit anyone even when I had my teeth. Julius —Mr. Margate—always took excellent care of me. Bought me canned blood, the kind they use in transfusions. Liver extract. Anything I wanted. I was never hungry."

"Best-hearted guy in the world," Captain Hollis repeated. "Besides, you've got nothing to worry about. You're Type C, and Mr. Simpkins here is allergic to Type C blood; ain't you now, Mr. Simpkins?"

"Of course. There's nothing to be afraid of," reassured the vampire. He mumbled badly through his aching jaws.

"If you're a sample of Mr. Margate's house-guests, I'm going to have a pretty tough job," I answered.

"Not at all. Now take me, for example. I'm no bother to anyone. Of course, I don't like to have mirrors in my room, and I can't cross running water. You'd think I'd have trouble bathing, but I use liquid soap and oil."

"I don't want to know a vampire's beauty secrets," I retorted, somewhat harshly. Mr. Simpkins looked glum.

"You don't like me," he accused. "Nobody likes me."

"There, there," Captain Hollis consoled him. "Of course he likes you. We all like you. Doesn't the Boss take care of you? Didn't he bring you all the way from Transylvania and put you up in his swell mansion? Doesn't he give you everything you want?"

"Everybody hates me," the vampire mumbled. "I'm going out and let the worms eat me."

"Don't talk like that, dammit! You're acting very ungrateful to the Boss. Why when we found you back there in Europe, you was starving to death. Sneaking into henhouses at night and killing chickens, you was. Living from hand to mouth. Thin—you was anaemic! And all the time afraid somebody was going to find out where you holed up to sleep in the daytime.

"Now look at you! Got a swell boudoir rigged up down in the cellar. Nobody to bother you. All you got to do is come out at night and talk to the Boss. He's gonna write you up in his book, he says. You'll be famous!"

Mr. Simpkins smiled weakly. "Maybe I am a bit hasty," he conceded. "And I assure you I shall be of little trouble." He turned to me. "I am a noctambulistic soul. I sleep from sunrise to sunset. My wants are simple. I won't bother you."

This was evidently meant to console me. It didn't.

"Listen," I began, addressing the captain. "You might as well tell me everything now. What about these other house-guests? Has Mr. Margate got a couple of zombies boarding with him? Any ghouls to feed?"

"The Boss? Of course not—he wouldn't have anything to do with no such creatures. Kindest guy in the world. But wait a minute. You can get the dope straight from him."

I hadn't realized it, but the car was turning into a driveway. We rode through an avenue of trees, hinting at spacious grounds beyond. The limousine pulled up before the steps of a large, rambling stone structure. The interior, brilliantly illuminated, justified the captain's description. It was a mansion, all right, and a big one.

We climbed out—Simpkins, the captain, and myself. Dave the chauffeur drove off to the rear.

Simpkins rang the bell. The door opened. No butler stood there. Instead,

a pudgy little man in an ornate purple lounging jacket fairly flung himself out onto the terrace. His shock of gray hair bristled with an excitement matched by the gleam in his darting black eyes.

"Here you are! How's your jaw, Simpkins? Ha, ha—explain about that later. Matter of necessity. Captain? Everything shipshape? Want to see you tonight. And you—you must be the new house man."

His hand pumped mine in a friendly, vigorous grip. "My name's Margate. Julius Margate. Sorry, we haven't got a butler. Can't keep them. Devil of a servant problem. Hope you'll be a bit more broad-minded."

He ushered us inside, bustling and talking in a quite breathless manner.

"Got a very good report on you from the agency, young man. Very good. Seem to be just what I need around here. So much to attend to, you know. So much. But come along—I'll show you to your rooms later. Right now, dinner's waiting."

I followed the short man and the captain through the long hall. We entered a spacious dining room. The table was set for three.

"You're eating upstairs, aren't you?" Margate called to Simpkins. The vampire nodded.

"I'll be up to visit later," said the host. "Want to take some notes."

He turned to me.

"Hear you're a writer. Fine! You'll be interested in the book I'm doing. Helpful too, no doubt."

We sat down, following Margate's example.

"Jory's cooking," Margate said. "Had him go out and take Trina her fish. Gerymanx ate earlier. Took his stuff out myself. We'll have to teach our new house man how to feed our guests, eh, Captain?"

Margate turned his gray head.

"Jory!" he called. "Oh, Jory—we're ready now!"

Jory brought the platter in from the kitchen. I was introduced quite naturally. I correctly assumed that Jory was a guest, not the cook.

As far as I was concerned, Jory would be neither guest or cook in any house of mine.

JORY was a big man. Too big. His arms were too long and his legs were too short. He didn't have any neck. His hair was long. And plentiful. It ran over his forehead and bristled on cheek and chin. It sprouted from his wrists.

If he were my guest I'd insist on his using a depilatory. And I'd send him to the dentist too. I didn't like the look of his teeth when he smiled at me.

"You new house man, huh?" he grunted.

"That's right, Mr. Jory."

"Okay. Where's my flea powder?"

I'd forgotten about that little item. I took the can from my pocket and handed it to him.

"Thanks," he grunted.

His huge fingers tore open the lid. Raising the can, he doused his head liberally with the powder. With a nonchalant smirk he unbuttoned his shirt and poured flea powder down his chest.

"Jory—please!" objected Margate.

"Huh?"

"The moon will be up in half an hour. I'll powder you then, after you change."

Margate turned to me.

"Jory's a werewolf," he explained.

I tried to get up. The captain tripped me with his cane.

"He changes every night when the moon is more than half full," Margate continued. "But there's nothing to worry about. I've got his lycanthropy under control. He doesn't get violent unless he sees the moon, and I take care of that. Make him wear dark glasses."

Jory shuffled out of the room. The

others began to eat. I didn't feel very hungry, somehow.

"You mustn't mind Jory," Margate told me, noticing my hesitation. "He's crude, I'll admit. Illiterate peasant type. Hungarian backwoods, you know. Hasn't got the breeding of Mr. Simpkins. But he means well. Faithful as a dog, too.

"That's his only trouble. That canine streak. You know," Margate confided, "I wouldn't want it to get around for the world, but in winter Jory has a very bad habit. He *sheds!* Dreadfully. Usually make him stay in his room. He prefers to sleep in the kennel in back, of course, but I see to it that his hamburger is waiting for him upstairs. Fleas bother him a bit, too. But not so much any more. When the captain captured him he was really—I confess—mangy."

Margate passed me my salad.

"You ever bathe a dog?" he asked. "You can give Jory a bath every so often."

Bathing a werewolf somehow didn't appeal to me. But I was past making objections.

"I'd like to introduce you to some of our other guests later this evening," Margate said. "But I doubt if I'll have time. I must talk to the captain here. Fact is, Captain, I've got another voyage planned for you."

"Now?" boomed Captain Hollis.

"Yes, for you and Dave both."

"What're we after this trip?"

"Never mind."

Margate glanced at me significantly.

"I'll tell you later. But it's the kind of thing I need you for especially. No one else could do it. And Dave has his part to play as well."

"Don't like it," the captain answered. "Risky business. Blockades and submarines and all. Where to?"

"Greece again."

"German-occupied."

"You'll get by if you follow orders. You'll be using my yacht, you know. Little danger of being fired on. And the regular crew. They'll handle things. All you must do is follow the map and act when the time comes."

"Something hard to capture?"

"Very hard. Hardest yet. No one but you could do it. There's a bonus in it, of course. Make it worth your while."

The captain grunted. Margate beamed on me.

"Well, young man—suppose you're drawing your own conclusions?"

"More or less," I admitted.

"What do you make of my little household from what you've seen of it?"

"It's very—unusual," I ventured.

"Unusual? Diplomatic word. Very. Tactful, aren't you? Why don't you come right out with it and say you think I'm crazy?"

"Because I suspect that I might be the crazy one."

"Ha. Good! Very good!" Margate leaned back. He offered me a cigar. I took it as we sipped our coffee.

"Don't alarm yourself," he told me. "It's very simple. I'm a collector, that's all. Just a collector. Hobby of mine. Many wealthy men collect books. Some collect paintings, or antique furniture. I collect mythological entities."

"So I see."

"Might call me something of a hunter, too. But I'm not interested in the usual big game. Besides, even if I have captured most of my guests, they are guests. And are treated as such. I rather flatter myself that I've improved their lot. It's not easy, in times like these, to be a vampire or a werewolf."

I AGREED with him on *that*.

"Perhaps you're wondering just what impulse led me to the pursuit of this little hobby?"

"I am."

Margate giggled.

"Oh, it's silly enough, I suppose. At least to people who fancy themselves the practical, hard-headed sort. As a boy, I mooned around a lot over books. Mythology. Bulfinch. You know the stuff. I inherited money. There was no need to work. I inherited a certain amount of intelligence, too, I claim. Enough intelligence to avoid emulating the average career of the wealthy man of leisure. You know the stuff—blondes, polo, blondes, golf, blondes, horses, blondes, tennis." He giggled again. "But I do like blondes," he added.

"You might say I rebelled against certain so-called rational concepts of reality. I began to study myth-cultures. I convinced myself that certain deviations from the accepted norm existed in Nature. That the legends of supernatural presences and entities might conceivably rest on a basis of truth. That you can't sit back and say, 'There is no such thing as a werewolf,' for example, if you've never looked for one. Besides. psychopathology has only recently admitted the psychotic existence of werewolves, if not the physiological possibility.

"I knocked around the globe a bit in the yacht. Picked up Captain Hollis, here. A good man, the captain. Lost his eyes in my service. A maenad scratched them out, off the Dardanelles."

"She was a hussy, that one!" the captain boomed.

"We found a few things together, he and I. Things the hard-headed scientific boys never bothered to look for. They're always willing to go chasing off to nowhere and back to capture a reported new specimen of gorilla, or something, but you never hear of them getting up an expedition to actually track down a sea-serpent, for example. Dullards!

"At any rate, you'll meet some of my —discoveries—later. At the moment, I am engaged on a little writing project of my own. Sort of combination of clinical case-histories and a revision of mythology. That's why my guests are here. I'm extracting their life histories."

Margate smiled amiably.

"I think you'll like it here, once you get accustomed to things," he said. "There's a number of tasks for you to perform, of course. But if you humor my guests a bit you won't have any trouble. They're all goodhearted, if a little unusual."

A crash interrupted his monologue.

"The kitchen!" the captain muttered.

Indeed, the noise of falling crockery and silver resounded from the kitchen doorway.

Margate was on his feet. I followed him.

"Damn that Jory! How often have I told him not to change in the house? He's always doing that, and he always smashes the dishes!"

We stared into the kitchen.

Floundering amidst a welter of broken plates, a large wolf stared up at us with contrite eyes. The wolf had brown fur—like Jory's hair, only more of it. The wolf was panting a little, and its red tongue lolled.

As we watched, it rose to its paws and uttered a little yelp of embarrassment.

"Oh, Jory, you're so careless!" Margate sighed, shaking his head.

The wolf nuzzled against his leg.

"All right. But try to remember!"

I stared at the red eyes. Jory's eyes.

Now I was able to trace, not without a certain fascinated horror, the human outlines inherent in the wolf body. The bony structure of the ribs. The peculiar adaptation of elbow to joint. The finger-like pattern of the paws. And the human cast of the lupine muzzle.

The werewolf turned and began to scratch patiently at the door.

Margate stared at me.

"Oh dear!" he whispered. "Oh dear!"

"What's the matter?"

He stepped to the wall and took down a harness and muzzle. Stooping, he adjusted them about the wolf's body and throat.

"I'm sorry," he told me. "But I'm afraid you'll have to take Jory outside. I can tell he wants to go."

He placed the end of the leash in my nerveless fingers and pushed me forward into the night. The wolf tugged me into darkness.

"Just once around the block," Margate cautioned.

So I did it. My first duty in the house of my new employer was to walk his pet werewolf around the block.

3. Sleeping Beauty

I SLEPT soundly that evening, in spite of it all. I could save my nightmares for when I was awake.

Margate met me at the breakfast table. He was in bubbling spirits—as usual.

"The captain's left," he announced. "Got his maps and orders last night. Should be gone about six weeks, I estimate."

He chuckled to himself.

"If he succeeds this time, my collection will be complete."

"After something unusual?"

"Unusual is hardly the word! This one will really paralyze you! Hope he makes it all right."

"Isn't it a risky business for a blind man?"

"Riskier for a man with his eyes." Margate babbled on. "But finish your breakfast. I'm going to show you around."

I had hardly downed my coffee when Margate jumped up from the table, bursting with eagerness.

"Come on, come on!"

He led the way into the yard. We walked along a shaded gravel pathway leading to the rear of the house. Margate stooped midway.

"Jory's tracks," he muttered. "Didn't hear him come in last night. Oh well, he'll sleep until noon or later. And Simpkins won't be with us until sundown."

We proceeded, moving between ordered flower-beds.

"Warm, isn't it?" Margate commented. He paused in the shadow of a tree.

"It is hot." I rested my hand against the trunk.

"Get your hands off me!" commanded a voice.

I looked around. There was nothing to see.

"You heard me!" The voice was high, feminine; yet strangely muffled.

I stared again. As I did so, a branch descended and slapped my face.

"Fresh!"

Margate laughed.

"That's Myrtle," he explained. "In the tree. A hamadryad."

I wheeled and surveyed the tree. It looked quite ordinary to me.

"Tree nymph," Margate continued. "Don't mind her. Her bark is worse than her bite."

"That isn't funny," came the voice from the tree. "Who's the new fellow, Margate?"

"That's our new house man."

"Hmm. Not very polite, I must say."

I thought it best to turn and bow at the branches.

"Sorry if I offended you. As a matter of fact, I was merely admiring your limbs. That's a lovely trunk you have there."

This was the right approach. I could tell that. A peal of girlish laughter was my reward.

"Flatterer!"

"Not at all, I assure you."

"Margate," said Myrtle, softly. "I hate to say it, but I wish you'd remember to tell Jory to keep away from me when—"

"Of course, Myrtle. He's just thoughtless, that's all. How are things otherwise?"

"Pretty fair."

"Your new friend here can climb a tree. I might have him shinny up you if you want to be pruned at any time."

I recalled that tree-climbing was one of my requisites listed by the employment man. Type C blood, fond of animals, a tree-climber—yes, it worked in, all right.

"I'd be glad to handle your limbs at any time," I offered.

Myrtle laughed.

"How you talk!" Her branches shook coyly.

Margate moved on down the path. I followed. Myrtle resulted coyly in farewell.

"Lovely girl," my employer remarked. "Often wonder what she looked like. The captain picked her up in the Carpathians. Had to fight off a gang of peasants when he transplanted her." He sighed reminiscently.

We walked down a graveled pathway through the garden which led to the door of a large, low structure. It resembled a stable or barn.

"Want you to meet Gerymanx," Margate explained, as we entered. He bustled in. I had to stoop in order to pass the doorway.

Gerymanx stood in a large stall. Or rather, a part of Gerymanx. Gerymanx was a horse, and since his back was turned toward me, the part I gazed upon hardly constituted a proper introduction.

"There he is," said Margate. "Nice looking, isn't he?" He thumbed at the portion of Gerymanx which was visible. "Ever see anything like it before?"

I had an answer for that one.

SUDDENLY, at the rear of the stall, a man raised his head and peered intently at us. He was a stranger, and a rather disreputable one. Tousle headed and unshaven, he bared prominent yellow teeth in sly grin.

It rather disappointed me to find Margate employing such a raffish-looking fellow. I told him so, under my breath.

"Not much of a stable-boy," I commented.

"Stable-boy? That's no stable-boy, that's Gerymanx."

"But I thought you told me this—this thing—is Gerymanx," I protested, weakly indicating the protruding brown backside of the horse.

"So it is. But the head is also Gerymanx. Don't you understand, my boy? Gerymanx is a centaur."

He would be. I might have known it. But I could hardly control my confusion when the human head wheeled, the horse body pivoted, and Gerymanx trotted out of his stall to welcome us formally.

I am no judge of horseflesh, and certainly no judge of centaurflesh either, but I must admit Gerymanx was impressive. His horse-body glistened beautifully in the sunshine from the stable sky-light. His human torso, rising from the waist, was superbly muscled. I had always imagined centaurs to be somewhat shaggy. Gerymanx wasn't. He trotted forward, and upon our introduction, shook hands. He had to bend his elbows to do it, being considerably taller than myself.

"A pleasure," he boomed. "Mr. Margate here tells me you're quite a horseman. We must go for a ride together soon."

Margate beamed with pride. "Gerymanx is quite a pacer," he told me. "Four-gaited."

"Glad to get out again," the centaur went on. "No one has been around to exercise me but Dave, and he can't do anything but hang on. Thought I'd like to work out mornings and maybe enter the steeplechase this fall."

"He's very ambitious," Margate added. "Wants to race." He turned to the centaur. "How's the oat situation?"

"Pretty fair. You can tell this gentleman here what to do for me. I'd like to be curry-combed this week, if you don't mind."

"Your mane wants clipping," Margate observed, critically.

"Guess it does." The centaur smiled coyly. "You know, Margate, I've been thinking of having my tail bobbed."

"Don't do anything hasty now," my host begged.

"But it's all the style. I was looking at the *Breeder's Annual* last night."

"We'll discuss that later," said Mr. Margate, curtly. "Right now we have to be moving on. I'm sure you two will get to be great friends."

He turned to me. "I must give you instructions on Gerymanx shortly. You'll take care of him as well as Myrtle and the rest."

We moved out of the stable as Gerymanx trotted back into his stall.

"Lunch time. Listen—I want you to call up the grocer in town and order a few items for me."

We marched back to the house.

"You understand, I can hardly allow tradespeople to get in here. You'll meet them at the gate, of course. But let's see now. We'll need a roast for ourselves—and some raw hamburger — about two pounds—a bottle of Lextron—that's Vitamin B extract for Mr. Simpkins—better get a bottle of Glover's Mange Cure for Jory—five pounds of halibut steak—and then call the feed store and ask them to send up a bale of hay—a bottle of tabasco sauce—"

I used the hall phone.

"Afraid you're going to be in for a little heavy duty these days," Mr. Margate apologized. "What with the captain and Dave away. Why not run upstairs and take a shower before lunch? It might freshen you up a bit for the afternoon. I want to go over the notes for my book with you, if you don't mind. Run along now—I'll fix us a snack if Jory isn't around."

I ascended the stairs to my own quarters. I had quite a nice bedroom with bath attached. I noted that my things had arrived some time during the morning. Jory must have brought them up.

It was quiet in my room. Quiet, and normal. That's what I needed most. A touch of normalcy, after all this bewilderment.

I walked into the bathroom, reached around the shower curtains and turned on the water. Then I undressed, slowly. I had a cigarette—one of Margate's Turkish. I went back to the bath. I pulled aside the curtain, climbed in the tub.

"Hey!" said a voice.

I looked down.

THERE was a girl in the bathtub.

She was a very pretty girl. I noticed that at once. She had a long oval face, high cheekbones, deep blue eyes, and long, curly hair.

I also observed that she would look good in a sweater, though at the moment she wasn't wearing any that I could notice. And I noticed.

"Hey," she repeated, staring up at me.

I just stood there. Because a second glance afforded me certain observations of a disturbing nature. She was a pretty girl with long hair, all right—but her hair was green. A vivid green. Most unusual color.

"What are you trying to do?" persisted the girl.

"I was just going to take a bath," I answered, not too brightly.

"Well don't stand there on one leg like a stork, then," she replied. "Come on in. The water's fine."

I didn't move, but I was taken aback.

"Who are you?" prattled the chatter-

box in the tub. "My but you're skinny, aren't you?"

It was a trifle disturbing—this criticism. What would you say if you walked into your bathroom and a strange girl in your tub made disparaging remarks about your physique?

I was still pondering the problem when a discreet cough sounded from the doorway.

It was Margate.

He ignored me and strode toward the tub, staring down at the soapy water.

"So here you are, Trina," he accused. "At it again, eh? How did you ever get up here?"

"Jory carried me," answered the girl, defiantly. "I didn't think anyone would notice. Besides, I just wanted to use the bath salts."

"Well, you'll have to get out now. This is our new house man. He wants a bath, I imagine. That is what you want, isn't it?" he added, turning to me for corroboration.

"Yes."

"Oh very well. If you will be a pig, and hog it all for yourself." Trina sulked. "Lift me out."

I hesitated.

"Come on."

I stooped and lifted. She was slippery. But that wasn't the reason I almost dropped her.

I was staring at her waist. At the green—oh, it might as well be admitted! Trina was a mermaid.

"Shame on you," Margate scolded. "I thought I told you not to leave your tank." He sighed. "What will our new house man think of us, I wonder? Jory changing in the kitchen and you sneaking into his tub."

"I just wanted bath salts," the mermaid wailed. "And a chance to use this lovely mirror here to comb my hair." Her eyelids fluttered up at me coyly, like waving kelp. "Maybe you'll help me comb my hair?" she suggested.

"Not now!" Margate extended his arms. "Here, give her to me. Go ahead and bathe in peace."

He bore Trina from the room. A most attractive armful, too. I bathed meditatively.

At the luncheon table, Margate confided in me.

"It's her French blood," he declared. "Trina's a Breton, you know. Found her off the coast of Brittany, two years ago August. Just before the war.

"She's the restless type, though. Wants to sneak out to bathing beaches, I suppose. Crazy about bath salts and perfumes. Guess she's lonesome. Used to a lot of oceanides and nereides around. To say nothing of sailors."

"I like her," I ventured. "I don't blame her for getting bored in a tank. It must be like living the life of a goldfish. Isn't there a swimming pool or something around here?"

"Say, that's an idea! You could dig her one! There in the garden. You know how to handle cement?"

"Guess I could manage."

"Jory will help," Margate promised. "Say, that's fine."

We finished our luncheon in high humor. After a smoke we adjourned to Margate's study.

It was more of a library than a study, and more of a museum than a library. The walls were lined with bookshelves. I scanned the titles with eager curiosity.

"Quite a collection you have here," I commented. "Lots of sorcery."

Margate gave me an earnest glance. "Just for reading purposes," he emphasized. "Never monkey with the stuff personally. Too dangerous."

I noted a glass bell jar on the side table. A long, thin bone rested on a cushion within. Margate marked my interest.

"Supposed to be unicorn horn," he explained. "But I'm inclined to believe it's a fake. Anybody knows there are no such things as unicorns."

I RETURNED to the large center table and desk. In order to avoid resting my fingers on a mummified head I brought my hand down on a large, dark brown bottle. Margate gasped.

"Careful there! Don't jiggle that bottle! Got a djinn in there."

I stepped back.

"Bought it from a sailor in Aden. Set me back a pretty penny. Don't know why I wanted it—I'm afraid to open the thing."

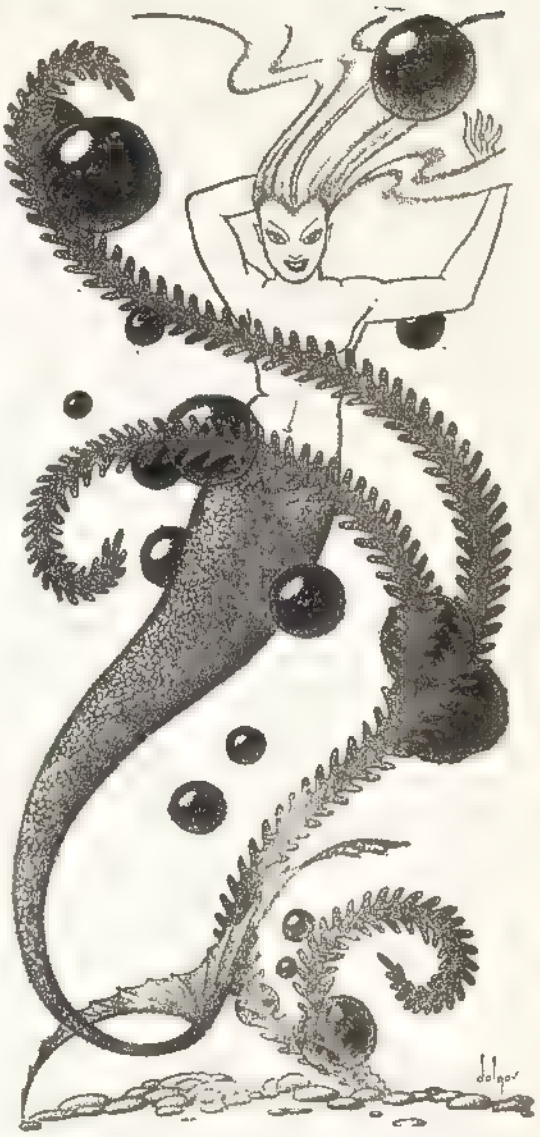
I stared into the brown, cloudy glass. I could see nothing. But when I lifted the bottle it gave forth a rustling sound—a most disconcerting noise to emanate from glass or liquid.

"Let me see, now," Margate began. He stooped over the desk drawers and began to draw forth sheafs of manuscript.

"Here's the case history of Mr. Simpkins," he muttered. And the notes Jory is giving me. Cave stuff—archeological background from Gerymanx. What's this? Oh, the report of the Demonolatrical Society. 1936. Out of date.

He lifted his hands, eyebrows waggling in despair.

"You see? Everything's topsy-turvy. Never get anything done this way. Need some system. A little order. Then I can get started again."



But somehow we didn't get at any filing system that afternoon. We sat down and got involved in a little discussion, during which my employer added a few scraps of information to my data on his life-work.

I learned that he had conducted this somewhat singular menage of his for about five years. Mr. Simpkins was his oldest guest; then Gerymanx, Myrtle, and Jory. Trina was really the latest acquisition.

They got along fairly well together, according to Margate. Of course he humored them. Kept them happy. And in return, they afforded him diversion enough to recompense him for the sacrifice of a normal social life.

"Never go out," Margate told me. "Couldn't afford to, under the circumstances. Never invite guests, either. But the book is coming along, and it's well worth it. When I am finished I'll take my place alongside of Frazer and Ellis. What Dar-

win and Huxley did in their fields I will do in mine."

He seemed a simple soul, did Julius Margate. I felt a growing affection for the man.

"Only one complaint," he confided. "People are always trying to palm off fakes on me. Those things get around, you know. I've had side-show dealers trying to sell me freaks. And some unscrupulous dealers try to peddle their fakes—monstrosities that never existed. Missing links, and basilisks. One Irish rogue had the cheek to claim he could secure a leprechaun. Anyone with any sense knows there aren't things like that. I ask you, now, is that right?"

He didn't wait for an answer, but rose to his feet with a frown.

"Dear me! Almost supper time. Better dash out to the gate for those groceries. I'll route Jory out. He's in the kennel, most likely.

"On your way back," he called, "I think you'd better take a run down to the cellar. Fix the furnace. It'll be chilly tonight."

I left on my errand. After lugging up the groceries I made for the cellar stairs, descended.

It was dark down there. I struck three matches before I located the furnace in the gloom.

I found the coal, filled the hopper. It took some time. Little red shadows danced on the walls behind me as I got the fire glowing. It was cheerful, warm. I began to whistle.

Then I heard the sound.

The creaking, groaning sound from the corner.

And a rustling. A slow, crawling rustle. A slithering noise.

I lit a match, held it up in none too steady fingers.

Fire swept across a mound of churning earth. A mound in which a box was set—a long, white box. A box that opened. Opened in darkness, as two long arms rose silently, swiftly.

Something sat up. Something with a long white face.

With a sudden start, I recognized Mr. Simpkins.

"You!" I gasped.

"Hello." Simpkins rose. The earth fell from his black coat. He stretched himself and yawned.

"What time is it? Forgot to set the alarm clock again."

I stared down at the coffin from which he had emerged.

The vampire stood beside me. "Pretty bad, isn't it?" he commented.

I shuddered in complete agreement.

"Know what I'm going to do, my friend?" he asked.

"N—no."

"I am going to make our host purchase a new coffin for me. It's the least he can do to repay me for that scurvy trick of removing my teeth."

I nodded numbly.

"Since Dave is gone, you shall have to accompany me," he continued. "We can go tonight, I suppose."

"Go—where?"

"Why to the undertaking parlor, of course. Where else would you buy yourself a coffin?"

"I won't do it," I declared.

And that settled that.

After supper Mr. Simpkins and I went out to buy him a new coffin.

4. A Grave Undertaking

JASON HARRIS operated one of the most thriving mortuary chapels in the city. Business was never dead. Mr. Harris himself was always on hand to welcome a fresh customer. That's the only way he liked his customers—fresh.

But he didn't like us.

I could tell that almost as soon as Mr. Simpkins and I entered his outer display rooms.

It had been a struggle to drag me this far. Both Mr. Simpkins and Mr. Margate had argued with me—pointing out that I was the only one who could drive the vampire down, and that night was the only opportunity Simpkins had of going out to make a personal selection. They clinched the argument by reminding me that I was, after all, an employee. And an employee must be obedient.

Now I wanted to get the whole business over with, quickly and quietly. So when Jason Harris moved forward to greet us, I lost no time.

"My friend and I should like to purchase a coffin," I began.

"Very well." Mr. Harris assumed a mask of sympathy. "Might I inquire as to the nature of the bereavement in the family?"

Mr. Simpkins stepped out. "Never mind that. Just show us around this box factory of yours and we'll make our own selection."

"Of course." Somewhat disconcerted by the callousness of the request, Harris led us over to an imposing bronze casket.

"Here is one of our latest models," he began. "I want you to note the dignity of its outlines, the solidity of its construction, the—"

"What about a mattress?" inquired Mr. Simpkins, eagerly. "Has it got a mattress?"

"A mattress can be secured," Harris assured him. "But I must ask you to observe this special feature — the method whereby the sealed casket is made airtight."

"Airtight? Nothing doing," Simpkins snapped. "How do you expect a man to breathe in an airtight coffin? Why he'd strangle to death!"

"But the deceased does not breathe—"

"How do you know? You ever been deceased? Come to think of it you do look a little dead on your feet."

Mr. Harris was indeed quite pale.

"I don't seem to understand you gentlemen," he muttered.

"We just want to buy a coffin, that's all. For a body."

"What sort of body?" Mr. Harris persisted.

"Why no body in particular. Just any body."

The mortician looked agitated. "You aren't by any chance planning a murder? You're not gangsters, I hope?"

"Of course not." Mr. Simpkins gave out with a laugh that was meant to be reassuring. It wasn't. "Say, I heard a good one about an undertaker who specialized in gangster funerals. His motto was 'Don't Put All Your Yeggs in One Casket.' Good, eh?"

Mr. Harris didn't think so. He looked distressed. I took advantage of his confusion to pull the vampire over toward a small modest-appearing gray box.

"What about this?" I suggested.

"Not bad," Simpkins commented. "Streamlined. And plush lining. Always like a plush lining."

"This is a very select model," Harris assured us. "One of our most popular styles this season."

"Never mind the sales build-up," said Simpkins. "I'll just try it out for myself."

Lifting the lid, he climbed into the coffin and lay down.

"Very comfortable," he grunted. "Lots of leg room."

This statement didn't please the undertaker either. He kept staring at Mr. Simpkins with a rapt expression, and his teeth began to chatter like a bunch of women around a Gin Rummy game.

"This coffin isn't for you!" he exclaimed.

"Of course it is. I always pick out my own coffins when I get the chance."

"Most people don't get a chance," Harris was forced to observe.

"Not me. I'm different. I've picked out five coffins in my time. Outlasted them all." Without waiting to observe the reaction to this last statement, Mr. Simpkins suddenly banged the lid shut. A moment later he pushed it up again.

"Have to oil this lid," he complained. "I might want to get out in a hurry some time. You know how it is."

"NO, I don't," the undertaker confessed. "I don't want to know how it is, either. You two get out of here. You are crazy."

"A fine way for a mortician to talk to a customer," Simpkins bridled. "All right. I don't want your old box anyway. It's lousy. Why I would be ashamed to be found dead in one of your coffins."

He rose. "Come on," he told me. "We'll try another joint down the street where the service is better. I probably can make a deal on a trade-in of the old casket, too."

Mr. Harris forced a smile.

"Don't be hasty," he coaxed. "It's just that I didn't seem to understand. But I guess I do now. You want to purchase this coffin to sleep in, is that it?"

"Of course," said Mr. Simpkins, in a disgusted voice. "What would *you* do in a coffin?"

"Very little," the mortician assured him. "But, if I might inquire, why don't you purchase a bed? "

"Beds? Bah! The dirt gets onto the sheets," Simpkins complained. "And the light comes in, too."

"You sleep during the day?"

"That's right. I want something that's dark. Something to keep out the dirt. To say nothing of the worms."

"You have worms?" asked Mr. Harris in spite of himself.

"I'll say I have worms," answered the vampire.

"Dyspepsia is my trouble," the undertaker confessed.

"Maybe a coffin would help you, too."

"Never thought of it. Quiet in there, isn't it?"

"Very quiet. And think of the plush lining—all that satin and stuff!"

"Interesting idea, if a little morbid."

"Beds are expensive," the vampire continued. "And linen is high, too. I should think, with all these swell boxes lying around, you'd just hop into one for forty winks now and then."

Harris scratched his head.

"I'd have to talk it over with my wife first," he mused.

"Haven't you got any of these double caskets? The big jobs?"

"Yes. It might work out at that."

"Just a thought, friend. By the way—guess we'll take this one."

Harris resumed his professional interest. He quoted a price. I paid him.

"Do you want this delivered?" he asked.

"I'll take it with me," Simpkins responded. He grabbed one end of the casket and I took the other.

Harris followed us to the door. "But this is all so unusual—I'm a little confused. You really want to get into this coffin?"

"Sure as I'm alive," Simpkins answered.

Harris sighed deeply.

"Well, it's your own funeral."

"Not bad!" Simpkins chuckled. "And don't forget what I told you. Try a casket yourself for sleeping purposes. I'd love to see you in a coffin."

The undertaker shuddered visibly.

"Oh, gentlemen," he called, as we opened the door. "Just one thing more. It's customary to have the name and address when anyone purchases a casket."

Simpkins turned. "Look me up out at Everest Cemetery," he suggested, maliciously. "I've got a nice grave out there."

Harris trembled.

"Drop in some time," Simpkins added.

As we closed the door, the undertaker turned and ran back into his shop. His shoulders heaved.

"Now see what you did," I accused, as we climbed into the car. "He probably won't be able to work for a week now."

Mr. Simpkins was contrite.

"I was only trying to be funny," he apologized. "Besides, let him close up the funeral parlor if he wants to. Business is probably dead anyway."

I shivered as we drove off. Vampires I could learn to stand—but puns, never. If Mr. Simpkins didn't behave, he'd find some worms on his pillow one of these days.

5. A Social Centaur

THE ensuing days were unexpectedly pleasant. Life quickly fell into a routine.

In the morning I usually went out to the stables and brought Gerymanx his oats and hay. Then I turned the hose on Myrtle. Afternoons I spent with Margate, trying to recopy his disordered notes and straighten out his reference sources in some kind of filing system.

At times I took Jory for a walk in the evening. Every Saturday night it was my duty to give him a bath. During the third week I had the rather unpleasant duty of shaving him, but on the whole I managed excellently.

At the time of the full moon I called up town and ordered a pair of motorcycle goggles. These fitted over his eyes more comfortably than the usual dark glasses, and he passed through the difficult days with a minimum of howling. Margate's system seemed to keep his lycanthropic instincts well under control.

Within a few weeks I had Mr. Margate's household running smoothly. My work in his study came to an end. He was able to sit down with his book material well organized. I saw little of him, these days—he spent most of his time taking new notes. Jory's recital occupied his immediate attention. Jory being rather stupid and illiterate, it was a difficult task to extract coherent information from him. But Margate persevered.

My first feeling of strangeness was almost completely dissipated. One can become adjusted to almost anything through constant familiarity.

I no longer found it shocking when Jory assumed his lupine form before my eyes. The spectacle of Mr. Simpkins snoring in his cellar coffin did not alarm me. Myrtle's muffled voice from the tree-trunk became as natural a manifestation as the rustling from the branches of surrounding elms. Gerymanx was no bother at all. He read his racing form, bragged heroically of his racing abilities, and had latterly become absorbed in a system of physical culture exercises he was taking through the mails.

Perhaps not visiting in town did it. Isolation inured me to the unusual. My duties were light, the food was excellent, and the hours passed swiftly.

Besides, there was Trina.

I got her out of that cellar tank in no time.

During the second week I began to dig the swimming pool. I worked alone, but it was a steady pace that I set for myself. Another week and I had the concrete laid. In the fifth week of my stay the pool was completed.

Trina didn't know, of course. I planned it as a surprise for her, with Margate's connivance.

When I carried her up from the basement she thought I was smuggling her in for a go at the bath salts—a frequent practice of mine which I might as well admit. We had become very friendly, Trina and I. After all, I'm broadminded enough to overlook little details like that emerald hair.

I took her out that afternoon and brought her to the pool.

At first she couldn't speak.

"Oooooh! she squealed. Tenderly, I threw her into the water. She splashed gaily. In a moment she swam over and put her arms around my neck.

"It's wonderful!" she whispered, and kissed me. It was the first time, but not the last. I found it very nice. A mermaid's kiss is moist, and a little salty, but very interesting.

I'd built a little rockpile in the center of the pool. She sunned herself like a Lorelei, her livid curls shimmering in the breeze, the radiance of her scales glistening against the water. Her long, delicate fingers, with just the fascinating suggestion of a web at the palm, beckoned to me. I went in the house and borrowed a pair of Margate's swimming trunks to join her.

AFTER that time went very swiftly indeed. I spent hours out there on the rocks with her. We'd swim awhile and sun awhile. She used to sing me some old Breton sea ballads in a piquant Flemish accent. Some of them were slightly bawdy, I suppose. I don't understand French very well.

Trina was happy for the first time in her life since she had been ensnared in Captain Hollis' nets.

"I've been like a fish out of water," she confessed to me. "It's like coming home again. Now, if I only had a few sailors—"

I put a stop to that talk in short order. Her weakness for seafaring men was really deplorable. But mermaids are like that, I suppose.

My fondest memories are those of the moonlight bathing parties. She and I in a world of silver water, gliding along under the moon. And afterwards we'd sit on the edge of the pool, roasting hot dogs or toasting marshmallows over a little fire. It was beautiful while it lasted.

Then came the well-remembered day. Along in the seventh week it was.

Margate met me at the breakfast table with a worried frown.

"What's the matter? Still stuck on that Jory memorandum?" I asked. "That part about the relation of the moon-flower to the anthropomorphic tendencies?"

"No, it's not that," Mr. Margate answered. He ran his hand through his bristling gray crop. "It's Captain Hollis and Dave. They're nearly two weeks late. Haven't had a word—not a cablegram."

"It's the war," I consoled him.

"Perhaps. But they're on a dangerous errand."

It wasn't the first time Margate had told me that. He was constantly hinting, but never revealing the nature of this quest.

"I wish you'd tell me," I said. "Maybe I could help."

"There's no way of helping," he answered. "Maybe I'm just a fool for planning this anyway. What good will it be if they are successful? I can't look and I can't listen. Never even see or hear what I get. Have to take my notes second-hand."

I COULDN'T make head or tail out of this recital.

"In case they do get back," Margate continued, "I'd better have you clear out the back room in the cellar. The big one. I've ordered sheet metal to cover the door. It's fairly soundproof. Just clear out the old furniture and leave the place vacant. We won't need any pen, or any food either, I don't suppose."

He sighed.

"The crew is reliable, though; Hollis has used the men before. They have their orders, but Hollis has to make the actual capture, of course. Dangerous business. Oh well, we'll just have to wait and see. Or rather, wait and not see."

Curiosity gnawed within me. I opened

my mouth. But Margate rose and cut me off.

"Say! I just remembered—are you a blacksmith?"

"No. Can't say that I am."

His face fell. "Too bad. Knew I'd forgotten something when I listed your requirements."

"What's the matter?"

"It's Gerymanx. He needs to be shod."

"Oh."

"Didn't he mention that his hooves hurt him?"

"Come to think of it, he said something of the sort to me yesterday. I assumed it was just a minor complaint."

"No, he needs shoes badly. And he'd like a manicure, I suppose." Margate sighed. "Tell you what you have to do. Take the small truck into town and see the blacksmith there. I've got the address. Used to ride him down at night myself.

But you'd better go. I want to stick around here in case Captain Hollis shows up."

"You mean I put the centaur in the back of the truck and haul it to a blacksmith shop?"

"It's all right. I've bribed this fellow heavily. Business being what it is in the smithy line these days, he keeps his mouth shut."

"But what about traveling on the road?"

"Oh, if you use the county truck you shouldn't have any trouble. Not much traffic."

"All right."

"Better get started." Margate scribbled down an address and gave me some money. I turned.

"Be careful now," he warned me. "And watch Gerymanx. He's a wild one when he gets loose. Got ambitions, he has. And he's too friendly. Keep him out of mischief and when he gets through bring him right back. Whatever you do, don't let him get into Droopy's Tavern next door. He's fond of the grape. We caught him that way, while he was drunk."

I hurried down the path. Trina called out to me from the pool.

"Coming in for a swim, dear?"

"Can't make it. Got to hurry into town." I stopped and gave her a kiss. "See you later."

She flipped her tail at me saucily and turned away.

Gerymanx was at the stable door.

"Margate says you're taking me in for a pedicure," he greeted me.

"That's right."

"You want a saddle?"

"No. You're coming in on the truck. And no monkey business either," I warned.

The centaur's face fell. "That's too bad. I thought we might have a little canter around the park before we went to the smith's."

"Nothing doing. Can't afford to attract any attention."

"Oh, all right," Gerymanx sulked. "Get the truck."

I pulled it out of the garage. It was a small job, but I was grateful for the enclosed sides on the compartment. They completely hid Gerymanx's astonishing body from view. Only his tousled head was visible above the railing.

"Take it easy," he called out.

I took it easy. Very easy. Every time we passed a car on the highway I slowed down, and I did my best to avoid jolting my peculiar passenger. It was almost lunchtime when we pulled up at the old brick smithy on the outskirts of town.

I backed the truck up to the door and walked inside.

THE blacksmith, who by the most appropriate coincidence was named Smith, came to the door. He was a broad-shouldered man with a bald head and a ruddy complexion.

"I've got a job for you," I began, hesi-

tantly. "Gentleman in back there wants to be shod."

Smith cocked his head at Gerymanx, then smiled.

"Oh—you're from Mr. Margate. I understand. Bring him inside, there's nobody around."

I led Gerymanx down the loading platform and hurried him into the stables.

"Make it snappy, will you?" I requested, nervously.

"Take about an hour," Smith told me. "Why not go next door and have a bite of lunch?"

It seemed like a sound suggestion. I entered Droopy's Tavern and sat down.

Mr. Droopy—if that was his name—proved to be a short little man with red hair and a permanently bored expression on his unshaven features.

"Whatsa gonna be?" he asked.

I ordered a sandwich and a glass of beer. The sandwich was liberally salted. I had a second glass of beer. It must have been salted too, because my thirst increased. I had a third glass, a fourth.

All this time I could hear a merry clanging from the smithy next door. Smith was at work.

The pounding ceased abruptly. Smith came in through a side door with a pail.

"How's it going?" I asked.

"Pretty hot work," he told me. He turned to the bar. "Hey, Droopy—fill this up."

Droopy took the pail over to the tap.

Smith went out again. In a few moments the clanging increased. Suddenly it halted once more. Smith re-entered with the empty pail.

"*Very* hot work," he explained. "Droopy—fill this up."

Again he went out. Again the clanging rose. And in a remarkably short time, Smith walked heavily in with his bucket.

"'Stremely hot," he mumbled. "Fill 'er up, Droop."

I watched Droopy fill the large pail. I ordered another beer myself. Smith stumbled out. More clanging. Then silence.

Smith wobbled through the door.

"Heat's terrific," he hiccupped. "Gotta fill thish up, Droop, ol' pal."

He went out. I listened intently. The clanging began again. But this time it held a peculiar cadence. A familiar cadence.

"Da-da da-da dee-da, de-da de-da, de-da-da.

Where had I heard *this* before?

I made for the side door and slipped into the smithy.

Gerymanx squatted on his haunches beside the blacksmith, whose left arm was locked around his neck. Both centaur and smithy held a hammer in their free hands. As I watched, they tapped merrily away on the anvil. Their raucous voices rose in a sour blending of the *Anvil Chorus*. The empty bucket, inverted, was perched on Gerymanx's shaggy head.

"Hello, pal!" the centaur greeted me.

I glared. "What is the meaning of this—this horseplay?"

Gerymanx wobbled to his feet.

"Wanna nother drink of beer!" he insisted. "Feet all shod. Now I wanna celebrate."

"Gerymanx!" I yelled. "Come back here!"

But it was too late. The centaur trotted unsteadily through the side door and into Droopy's Tavern.

He was up at the bar before the red-headed proprietor looked at him. From the waist up, it was a naked man who stared at the bartender and shouted, "Shoot the soup to me, Droop!"

"Where's your clothes?" Droopy demanded.

"I'm masquerading," the centaur temporized. I tugged at his elbow.

"Come on, get out of here," I whispered.

"I don't serve no naked persons," Droopy declared. He stepped around the bar, then fell back. His eyes took in the horse body.

"Gawd!" he breathed.

Gerymanx turned what was meant to be a reassuring smile on the bartender.

"Told you I was masquerading, didn't I?" he explained.

"Well, I don't like it." Droopy turned to me. "Get the blazes outta my joint," he demanded. "And take this horse's—whatever it is—with you!"

It was an ill-chosen moment for the entry of another couple. They lurched into the tavern; a tall, flashily-dressed man and an obviously befuddled woman. They stared incredulously at Gerymanx.

"Holy Moses!" muttered the man. "Do you see what I see?"

"Gawd, Harry, it's a mounted policeman." The woman peered tipsily at the centaur.

"What'd he do with his clothes?"

"And where's his legs?" The man quavered. "He's a horse!"

Gerymanx wheeled, offended. "Who you think you're talking to?" he bridled.

"A talking horse," the woman amended. "Harry, we better lay off the stuff for awhile."

"Lay off me, that's what you should do." Gerymanx tried to prance and stumbled unsteadily. His hooves clattered against a cuspidor.

"I bet his mother was frightened by a merry-go-round," the woman continued. "Oooh—look out!"

FOR Droopy had rounded the bar, bearing a baseball bat. He bore down on Gerymanx with an oath.

"I'll learn ya to horse around in my dump," he grated. "What you think this is, a livery stable?" He lifted his bat menacingly.

Gerymanx wheeled. His forefeet rose. Droopy sailed over the bar. With an inhuman neigh, the centaur dashed forward. His charge carried him through the door. I raced after him.

In his drunken fury, the centaur careened into the street. By some unfortunate mischance a milk-wagon was standing beside our truck. The mare between the shafts looked up, startled.

At the sight of Gerymanx she neighed coyly. A slow blush spread over her equine cheeks. Gerymanx whinnied. Suddenly the mare's eyes gave a flicker of apprehension as they rested on the centaur's human torso. With a shrill, indignant squeal she dashed forward, carrying the wagon with her. There was a grinding crash as the wagon tipped sideways—right into our truck.

At the same moment Droopy emerged from the tavern. Up the street the milkman dropped his bottle-rack with a clatter and started to run our way.

"Now you've done it, I panted. "Wrecked the truck, too!"

"Get on my back," Gerymanx mumbled. The shock had sobered him. "We'll make a run for it."

I mounted hastily.

"Hang on to my neck."

I hung.

"Here we go."

We went.

The centaur's hooves struck sparks from the brick as he raced down the street. I clung to him for dear life.

"Whee!" he yelled. "This is more like it!"

A glance showed me that our pursuers were gathered in a knot around the milk-wagon and truck.

"What a mess," I groaned. "How'll we ever get back?"

"I'll carry you."

"On top of the load you're carrying already?"

Gerymanx laughed.

"I feel great," he snorted over his shoulder. "Great. Let's go annoy some street cleaners."

"We're going home. Right now."

"Oh, don't be a wet blanket! I want to have fun. Let's go down to Saratoga. Maybe you could enter me in a race."

I allowed this revolting suggestion to go unanswered.

"Take me home," I commanded.

"But—"

"Listen, Gerymanx," I said, slowly. "You've got a pretty soft berth there at Margate's, and you know it. If you don't behave, I'll fix you."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell Margate to sell you to an ice dealer. Then you'll have to pull a wagon all day long, and yell, 'Ice for sale' into the bargain."

Gerymanx's pace slackened.

"All right," he grumbled. "All right."

"Stick to the side road now," I cautioned.

He did. It was a slow trip. We hid out behind billboards whenever I spotted a car ahead or behind us. It was almost twilight when we cantered through the gate and up the drive.

"That's about enough excitement for one day," I sighed.

But—

6. Blind Man's Bluff

"COME right in!" Margate urged, standing on the steps. He waved his arms expansively.

"Me too?" Gerymanx asked.

"Of course. Wouldn't be a party without you."

"But I'll track up the carpet—"

"Track away! We're going to celebrate tonight."

"What is all this?" I inquired.

Margate's flushed little face held a slightly tipsy grin.

"Great news! Captain Hollis is back, and the trip's a success."

"Fine. Where is he?"

"He called from the yacht basin. He's hired a truck and he ought to be up in a few hours."

"I'm anxious to see what he's got."

"You wouldn't be if you knew what it was." Margate snickered. "But come on, let's go inside and have a drink. I'm in the mood."

Gerymanx clattered after Margate and I followed.

The house was brilliantly illuminated. Margate was following its example. I found all the guests in the parlor. Trina sat in a wash tub. Mr. Simpkins was up and about. Jory, in his more or less human form, was busily mixing drinks.

"Success!" Margate proposed, passing glasses to the centaur and myself.

"How about some supper?" I suggested.

"Help yourself." Margate indicated a row of bottles.

I shrugged. He was too far gone to argue with. I sat down next to Trina and tried to get into the spirit of things.

I didn't succeed. Perhaps they were all too far ahead of me. Perhaps it was instinctive premonition. Maybe it was just the rotten sandwich I'd had at the tavern. Whatever it was, I was the skeleton at the feast. I couldn't get in the mood at all.

When Gerymanx began riding Mr. Simpkins around on his back I regarded it as so much horse-play. Trina, noticing my dour face, turned away and began to flutter her eyelashes at Margate.

Jory, who had been taking a drink for himself every time he mixed for anyone else, soon lost all control. He changed right in front of us, and began running around the room on his paws. Everyone seemed to get a great kick out of the spectacle, but it gave me the chills.

Margate was maudlinly solicitous.

"Whassa matter?" he demanded. "Come on, have a drink."

"No thanks."

"All right. Spoil the party. Go ahead."

I forced a smile. "I'm pretty tired. Think I'll hit the hay."

"Whassat? Aren't you gonna wait up to see the nice new spec'men Captain Hollis' gonna bring to the party? No welcoming comm'tee?"

"I guess not."

"All right, then." Margate shrugged, and nearly fell over. "Get me bucket full of whiskey," he called. Gerymanx trotted over.

"Bucket of whiskey? What for?"

"Myrtle isn't here. Gonna take it out and splash it all over her roots."

That was enough for me. I went upstairs to my room and climbed in bed.

Downstairs I could hear the murmurs from the parlor. The party was getting wild. I didn't like it. For the first time I was really ready to consider my situation. After all, this sort of thing couldn't go on forever. Trina was a nice girl, but you don't walk up the aisle with a mermaid. Mr. Simpkins was very nice, for a vampire, and Jory was an amiable enough werewolf. But we'd never be close friends. And being jockey to a centaur isn't exactly a recommendation to future employers. A man is known by the company he keeps. If this kept up, people would soon be pointing their finger at me for an incubus, or something.

I'd better have a talk with Margate soon, I decided. Yes. Margate would have to let me go. I was a little worried about him, anyway. It was hard to say what new monstrosity Hollis was bringing—but it would complicate matters. All this secrecy, and the special room in the cellar, now; this meant something pretty outlandish.

And there was Margate, whooping it up downstairs. Happy as a kid with a new toy. And just as irresponsible. Irresponsible! That was it. That's what the matter was with the whole crew. They couldn't cope with life. They needed a nursemaid. Being fantasies, they weren't able to face realities.

Oh well. In the morning, now—

I fell asleep.

I HAD the damnedest dream. It seemed to me that something sneaked into my room. It had Trina's hair and Jory's face, and it lumbered along on four hooves like Gerymanx. Somehow I got the idea that it had Mr. Simpkin's missing teeth, and it wanted to bite me. All the while it came closer it was laughing like Margate himself. I tried to move, but couldn't. It squatted right on top of me and grabbed at my throat. Its mouth opened.

I woke up.

Strong hands were closing around my neck.

"What the—"

The hands relaxed.

"Wake up!" boomed a voice.

It was Captain Hollis.

"How'd you get here?"

"I made it." The blind man was panting. "I had to get you. Come on."

I sat up. "What's the matter?" I yawned. "When did you get in?"

"About half an hour ago. Around midnight. But never mind. You've got to help me get them out! You've got to. You're the only one left."

"Where's Dave?"

"Dave's—gone."

"What do you mean?"

"When we captured it. He got bit. Buried him at sea." The captain's hurried tones reached me as he jostled me toward the door.

"Tell me what happened," I muttered, as we went down the hall. "Where is everybody?"

"They're in the cellar. With it."

"With what?"

"Don't ask questions. That's what finished them. They were sitting around drunk when I got in. I carried it into the cellar in a packing crate. But I passed Myrtle, and she's gone, too."

"I don't understand."

We moved across the deserted parlor. I snapped on lights as we went. Hollis came after me, cane tapping.

"Don't try to understand," he whispered. "I couldn't stop them. They had to take a peek. Margate forgot everything. Said he wasn't afraid, dammit, and it was his after all. The whole crew made for the cellar."

"Come on." I went on through the kitchen. "They're all down there?"

"Yes."

"But what happened to them? What's the matter? What must I do?"

"Try and get them out. Think of a way."

"What's that?"

I flattened myself against the wall of the dark staircase. A figure padded through the level below.

"Where?"

"Listen—footsteps."

"Jory. I know those paws."

It was Jory. The wolf was slinking down the cellar corridor.

"Jory—wait!" I called. He didn't look around.

We followed.

The wolf made straight for the door at the end of the hall. The metal-covered door. It stood ajar. His muzzle forced it wider. The gray body moved in.

"Stop—" Hollis began.

I heard a howl. Just one howl. A howl that rose, and then froze in midair on its highest quaver. After that, silence.

"It got him," Hollis whispered.

I moved forward.

Hollis clutched my arm. "Wait. Don't go in there."

"But you say they're all in there. You want me to get them out with you."

"I know. But you mustn't go in now. Not like that."

I faced the doorway. "Quit talking riddles. I'm going in."

Hollis held me.

I began to stare at the slight opening where the door hung ajar. It was dark beyond, but not so dark. A sort of subdued light filtered through. A light that didn't dissipate the darkness, but seemed to be a part of it. A stronger part.

IT WAS a violet light, but sharper than a distinct color. Radiant. Like the reflection of a million Christmas tree ornaments. Gaudy. Alluring.

Then I felt it. The urge to enter. I wanted to see that light. It was like the ray emanating from a great jewel.

I brushed the captain's hands away.

"Let me go," I muttered. "I want to go on."

Wriggling from his grasp, I darted forward. I opened the door—

With a grunt, Hollis lunged. His fist caught me in the eye. I reeled back. His other fist lashed out. I stumbled, my hands covering my face.

"What in blazes—"

I reeled, steadied myself, took my hands away. Darkness.

"Hollis, you fool—you've blacked my eyes for me!"

"I know. Now go in!"

I groped my way through the door. He followed.

We stood in darkness. Two blind men, in a room filled with a violet light.

"Where are we?"

I groped along the wall. The room was silent. Too silent. "Jory! Trina! Where are you?" I whispered. "Margate!" No answer. I stumbled forward, hands outstretched.

I touched something. Something cold. My hands flew back. But there was no

sound, no movement. I stretched my fingers forward once more. Again they rested on a cold surface. A hard surface.

I ran them along, tracing an all too familiar outline. Hair. A face. Trina's hair and face. But hard and cold. Cold as—marble.

"She's stone!"

"Of course. They're all stone. All of them."

I moved on. Another figure. I almost collided with it. It was a standing man. Bristly hair.

"Margate."

Hollis sighed behind me.

"That's why we both had to come in, dammit. To lift them out. They're too heavy."

"But Hollis—what is it? What did this?"

"The thing," the captain answered.

My fingers fumbled toward a third figure.

"What thing?" I asked.

My fingers came to rest, and found the answer.

This surface was cold too, but it wasn't motionless. My hands moved over a long neck, and then up into an icy tangle. Hair.

But the hair moved, too. It was thick, horribly thick, in solid coils. Coils that suddenly came to life, writhing forth with a rustling.

Then I heard the hissing, felt the hair coiling around my wrist, jerked my hand away in frantic haste.

"Serpents!" I muttered.

"Get back!" Hollis yelled. "It's the thing—that damned Gorgon—the Medusa!"

As the hissing rose to a shrill crescendo I turned and ran blindly out of the cellar room.

7. Stone Broke

THAT'S the way it was.

It must have been over an hour before Hollis argued me into going back with him to get them out. I consented, finally, and we went to work.

They must have weighed at least three hundred pounds apiece. Gerymanx we had to slide across the floor—too heavy to lift. It was all we could do to keep him from chipping.

Two blind men, carrying statues. We made it, though. Until at last there was only the hissing thing.

We locked the door on it. It couldn't walk, of course. I wanted to burn the place, but it would cause trouble later on.

Hollis and I had a long talk. He wouldn't tell me much more about his voyage. Or about the charts and directions Margate gave him. I know he found it somewhere close to Crete, and that's all. He had to go into the cave alone—being blind, it couldn't harm him. It was after he had it out that Dave reached into the sack and one of the snakes bit him.

I shuddered over my own narrow escape when I heard that.

"Poor Dave," Hollis grunted. "Mebbe it was just as well. Boss had a later job for him. Going after one of these sirens—that's what you call them. Because he was deaf and couldn't hear it."

He wouldn't tell me any more.

So there we were.

"We'll have to get some sleep," Hollis told me. "Then we can figure something out."

But in the morning there was nothing figured out. I could see a little, though my eyes were puffy and swollen. I got another nasty shock when I looked at the statues we dragged out.

Usually I admire life-like work, but these things were too damned life-like to suit me. Or to suit themselves, I suppose. Trina was lovely, though. It broke my heart to look at her. And Gerymanx looked quite imposing. Margate had one hand stuck out straight, as though to steady himself. Jory and Mr. Simpkins were

both caught in mid-howl. Their mouths were still open.

"Now what do we do?" Hollis groaned. "We can't go away and leave that Medusa thing down there alive."

"Why leave it alive?" I asked. "We can kill it."

He laughed sarcastically.

"That's what you think," he told me. "It won't die."

"But Perseus killed one."

"Who?"

"A Greek warrior. He had some kind of sword—"

"Boloney. It's still alive, ain't it? This Percy-what's-his-name must have been kidding somebody along."

"Never thought of that."

"Well, think of it, then. I know it won't die. Because I tried it myself."

"You did?"

"Sure. After it got Dave. I pumped six shots into the thing."

"You didn't!"

"You bet I did, dammit. And on the voyage back—two of the boys blundered onto it down in the cabin. Snoopers. It got them both. After that the rest went to work. The cook took a knife to it, from the rear. No result. Except that it turned around. I cooked the rest of the trip."

"It won't die, huh?"

"That's right."

This was a prettier problem than I'd expected. I looked at the stone faces around me. No solution there. But there must be a solution. I couldn't run off and leave that thing down in the cellar. Somebody would investigate sooner or later. And then—more statues.

"I'm going down there again."

"Oh, no you don't. You can see now."

I'd forgotten *that* little detail. I *could* see. I stared at my puffy eyes in the mirror.

Then I got it.

"Wait for me. I've found the way out."

"Not me. I'm heading for that yacht, and I'm not coming back."

"But Captain—"

He tapped off. I was left alone.

I acted fast. I found what I was looking for and went downstairs.

It was hard work unlocking the cellar door. It was harder work to nerve myself up to going in. The violet light shed its evil radiance through the chink of the keyhole.

But there was no choice. I opened the door and walked in.

The Medusa was against the wall in the center of the room. Alone, in Gorgonic glory. I heard the rustling whisper of the coiled tresses.

It didn't stop me.

I walked forward, holding the object I'd brought right squarely in front of my face. It was a shield.

"Hey!" I called.

The Gorgon wouldn't understand English. But this didn't matter. Just so long as I attracted attention.

"Hey—look!"

I was almost on top of it. But it looked. It must have looked.

Because I heard the damnedest hissing shriek that ever issued from the lips of nightmare. Whether it was the Gorgon or the serpents in its hair, I don't know.

That wail rose up as the Gorgon stared, and then there was silence.

After that, I stuck out my hand. I felt the cold face. The cold, *stony* face.

It had worked.

I dropped the object I was holding. It shattered there on the floor. But I didn't need it any more. Nor Perseus' sword.

I'd killed the Gorgon in the only possible way. I turned it to stone by showing it its own face in the mirror. So—

THERE it is. I've got two choices now. I can go back to the employment agency and try to get another job. Something quiet

and peaceful, like ditch-digging or assembly work in a boiler plant.

Or I could stay here and take care of my statues. I smashed the Medusa without looking at it. Used a crowbar. The others I have upstairs.

Margate has no relatives, so I might as well make myself at home. Let's see now —Trina would look good decorating the pool. Gerymanx would do for the foot of the staircase. I could make a gallery with Margate and Simpkins. As for Jory—I've got just the place for Jory.

I think that's the best solution, after all. Of course, I'll never touch anything that Margate dabbled in.

Which reminds me. That bottle, with the *djinn* inside. Maybe I can get rid of that, too.

If you should happen to know of anybody who would like to buy a genuine *djinn,* cheap, just send him up to Margate's place. You'll recognize the house quite easily.

It's the one with the stone wolf on the front lawn.

PROVES MAN IS GOD

A strange method of mind and body control, that leads to immense powers never before experienced, is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, F.R.G.S., well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report improvement in health. Others acquire superb bodily strength, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often, with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

This startling method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western world.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats, from the delay of old age to the prolonging of youth, and the achievement of dazzling business and professional success. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized by a false idea of what we really are.

Most of us know that God is everywhere, but never realize that God cannot be everywhere without being also in us. And if He is in us, then all His wisdom, all His power — unlimited knowledge and infinite power — is likewise in us. If God is everywhere, then there is nothing but God, and we also are that — a completely successful human life being the expression of God in man. The Holy Spirit of the Bible is an actual living force in man, and through it we too can do "greater things than these." The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing our minds of the hypnotizing ideas which blind us to the vast power of this living force within us.

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The Institute of Mentalphysics, Dept. A-68, 213 So. Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif.

The Hound

By FRITZ LEIBER

DAVID LASHLEY huddled the skimpy blankets around him and dully watched the cold light of an early spring morning seep through the window and stiffen in his room. He could not recall the exact nature of the terror against which he had fought his way into wakefulness, except that it had been in some way gigantic and had brought back to him the fear-ridden helplessness of childhood. It had lurked near him all night, and finally it had crouched over him and thrust down toward his face.

The radiator whined dismally with the first push of steam from the basement, and he shivered in response. He thought that his shivering was an ironically humorous recognition of the fact that his room was never warm except when he was out of it. But there was more to it than that. The penetrating whine had touched something in his mind without being quite able to dislodge it and bring it into consciousness. The mounting rumble of city traffic, together with the hoarse panting of a locomotive in the railroad yards, mingled themselves with the nearer sound, intensifying its disturbing tug at hidden fears. For a few moments he lay inert, listening. There was an unpleasant stench, too, in the room, he noticed, but that was nothing to be surprised at. He had experienced before the strange olfactory illusions that are part of the aftermath of sinus trouble and flu. Then he heard his mother moving around laboriously in the kitchen, and that stung him into action.

"Have you caught another cold?" she asked, watching him anxiously as he hurriedly spooned in a boiled egg before its heat should be entirely lost in the chilly plate. "Are you sure?" she persisted. "I heard someone sniffling all night."

"Perhaps father—" he began. She shook her head. "No, he's all right. His side was giving him a lot of pain yesterday evening, but he slept quietly enough. That's why I thought it must be you, David. I got up twice to see, but"—her voice became a little doleful—"I know you don't like me to come poking into your room at all hours."

"That's not true!" He contradicted. She looked so frail and little and worn, standing there in front of the stove with one of father's shapeless bathrobes hugged around her, so like a sick sparrow trying to appear chipper, that a futile irritation, and an indignation that he couldn't help her more, welled up within him, choking his voice a little. "It's that I don't want you getting up all the time, and missing your sleep. You have enough to do taking care of father all day long. And I've told you a dozen times that you mustn't make breakfast for me. You know the doctor says you need all the rest you can get."

"Oh, *I'm* all right," she answered quickly, "but I was sure you'd caught another cold. All night long I kept hearing it—a sniffling and a snuffling—"

COFFEE spilled over into the saucer, as David set down the half-raised cup. His mother's words had reawakened the elusive memory, and now that it had come back he did not want to look it in the face. His hand was shaking.

For the city has spawned its own horde of horrors. Yes, the city has its own werewolves.

"It's late, I'll have to rush," he said.

She accompanied him to the door, so accustomed to his hastiness that she saw in it nothing unusual. Her wan voice followed him down the dark apartment stair: "I hope a rat hasn't died in the walls. Did you notice the nasty smell?"

And then he was out of the door and had lost himself and his memories in the early morning rush of the city. Tires singing on asphalt. Cold engines coughing, then starting with a roar. Heels clicking on the sidewalk, hurrying, trotting, converging on street car intersections and elevated stations. Low heels, high heels. Heels of stenographers bound downtown and of housewives hastening to their stints of war work. Shouts of newsboys and glimpses of headlines: "AIR BLITZ ON. . . . BATTLESHIP SUNK. . . . BLACKOUT EXPECTED HERE. . . . DRIVEN BACK."

But sitting in the stuffy solemnity of the street car, it was impossible to keep from thinking of it any longer. Besides, the stale medicinal smell of the yellow woodwork immediately brought back the memory of that other smell. David Lashley clenched his hands in his overcoat pockets and asked himself how it was possible for a grown man to be so suddenly overwhelmed by a fear from childhood. Yet in the same instant he knew with terrible certainty that this was no childhood fear, this thing that had pursued him up the years, growing ever more vast and menacing, until, like the demon wolf Fenris at Ragnorak, its gaping jaws scraped heaven and earth, seeking to open wider. This thing that had dogged his footsteps, sometimes so far behind that he forgot its existence, but now so close that he could almost feel its cold sick breath on his neck. Werewolves? He had read up on such things at the library, fingering dusty books in uneasy fascination, but what he had read made them seem innocuous and without significance—dead superstitions—in comparison with this thing that was part and parcel of the great sprawling cities and chaotic peoples of the twentieth century, so much a part that he, David Lashley, winced at the endlessly varying howls and growls of traffic and industry—sounds at once animal and mechanical; shrank back with a start from the sight of headlights at night—those dazzling, unwinking eyes; trembled uncontrollably if he heard the scuffling of rats in an alley or caught sight in the evenings of the shadowy forms of lean mongrel dogs looking for food in vacant lots. "Sniffling and snuffling," his mother had said. What better words would you want to describe the inquisitive, persistent pryings of the beast that had crouched outside the bedroom door all night in his dreams and then finally pushed through to plant its dirty paws on his chest. For a moment, he saw superimposed on the yellow ceiling and garish advertising placards of the street car, its malformed muzzle . . . the red eyes like thickly scummed molten metal . . . the jaws slavered with thick black oil. . . .

Wildly he looked around at his fellow-passengers, seeking to blot out that vision, but it seemed to have slipped down into all of them, infecting them, giving their features an ugly canine cast—the slack, receding jaw of an otherwise pretty blond, the narrow head and wide-set eyes of an unshaven mechanic returning from the night shift. He sought refuge then in the open newspaper of the man sitting beside him, studying it intently without regard for the impression of rudeness he was creating. But there was a wolf in the cartoon, and he quickly turned away to stare through the dusty pane at the stores sliding by. Gradually the sense of oppressive menace lifted a little. But the cartoon had established another contact in his brain—the memory of a cartoon from the First World War. What the wolf or hound in that earlier cartoon had represented—war, famine, or the ruthlessness of the enemy—he could not say, but it had haunted his dreams for weeks, crouched in corners, and waited for him at the head of the stairs. Later he had tried to explain to friends the horrors that may lie in the

concrete symbolisms and personifications of a cartoon if interpreted naively by a child, but had been unable to get his idea across.

The conductor growled out the name of a downtown street, and once again he lost himself in the crowd, finding relief in the never-ceasing movement, the brushing of shoulders against his own.

BUT as the time-clock emitted its delayed musical bong! and he turned to stick his card in the rack, the girl at the desk looked up and remarked, "Aren't you going to punch in for your dog, too?"

"My dog?"

"Well, it was there just a second ago. Came in right behind you, looking as if it owned you—I mean you owned it." She giggled briefly through her nose. "One of Mrs. Montmorency's mastiffs escaped from the chauffeur and wandering around the store, I presume."

He continued to stare at her blankly. "A joke," she explained patiently, and returned to her work.

"I've got to get a grip on myself," he found himself muttering tritely as the elevator lowered him noiselessly to the basement.

"I've got to get a grip on myself," he kept repeating as he hurried to the locker room, left his coat and lunch, gave his hair a quick careful brushing, hurried again through the still-empty aisles, and slipped in behind the socks-and-handkerchiefs counter. "It's just nerves. I'm not crazy. But I got to get a grip on myself."

"What do you mean, talking to yourself and not noticing anybody? Don't you know that's the first symptom of insanity?"

Gertrude Rees had stopped on her way over to neckties. Light brown hair, faultlessly waved after the fashion of department-store salesgirls, framed a serious, not-too-pretty face.

"Just jittery, I guess," he murmured. "Sorry." What else could you say? Even to Gertrude?

"I guess all of us get that way sometimes these days, pal," she answered. Her hand slipped across the counter to squeeze his for a moment. "Buck up."

But even as he watched her walk away, his hands automatically arranging display boxes, the new question was furiously hammering in his brain. What else could you say? What words could you use to explain it? Above all, to whom could you tell it? A dozen names printed themselves in his mind and were as quickly discarded.

One remained. Tom Goodsell. Tom was a screwball with a lot of common sense. Liked to talk about queer things. He would tell Tom. Tonight, after the fire warden's class.

Shoppers were already filtering down into the basement. "He wears size eleven, madam? Yes, we have some new patterns in. These are silk and lisle." But their ever-increasing numbers gave him no sense of security. Crowding the aisles, they became shapes behind which something might hide. He was continually peering past them. A little child who wandered behind the counter and pushed at his knee, gave him a sudden fright.

Lunch came early for him. He arrived at the locker room in time to catch hold of Gertrude Rees as she retreated uncertainly from the dark doorway.

"Dog," she gasped. "Huge one. Gave me an awful start. Talk about jitters! Wonder where he ever came from? Watch out. He looked nasty."

But David, impelled by sudden recklessness born of fear and shock, was already inside and switching on the light.

"No dog in sight," he told her. His face was whiter than hers.

"You're crazy. It must be there." Her face, gingerly poked through the doorway, lengthened in surprise. "But I tell you

I— Oh, I guess it must have pushed out through the other door."

He did not tell her that the other door was bolted.

"I suppose a customer brought it in," she rattled on, nervously. "Some of them can't seem to shop unless they've got a pair of Russian wolfhounds. Though that kind usually keeps out of the bargain basement. I suppose we ought to find it before we eat lunch. It looked dangerous—"

But he hardly heard her. He had just noticed that his locker was open, and his overcoat dragged down on the floor. The brown paper bag containing his lunch had been torn open, and the contents rummaged through, as if an animal had been nosing at it. As he stooped, he saw that there were greasy, black stains on the sandwiches, and a familiar stale stench rose to his nostrils.

That night he found Tom Goodsell in a nervously elated mood. The latter had been called up and would start for camp in a week. As they sipped coffee in the empty little restaurant, Tom poured out a flood of talk about old times. David would have been able to listen better, had not the uncertain shadowy shapes outside the window been continually distracting his attention. Eventually he found an opportunity to turn the conversation down the channels which absorbed his mind.

"The supernatural beings of a modern city?" Tom answered, seeming to find nothing out of the way in the question. "Sure, they'd be different from the ghosts of yesterday. Each culture creates its own demons. Look, the Middle Ages built cathedrals, and pretty soon there were little gray shapes gliding around at night to talk with the gargoyles. Same thing ought to happen to us, with our skyscrapers and factories." He spoke eagerly, with all his old poetic flare, as if he'd just been meaning to discuss this very matter. He would talk about anything tonight. "I'll tell you how it works out, Dave. We begin by denying all the old haunts and superstitions. Why shouldn't we? They belong to the era of cottage and castle. They can't take root in the new environment. Science goes materialistic, proving that there isn't anything in the universe except tiny bundles of energy. As if, for that matter, a tiny bundle of energy mightn't mean—anything."

"But wait, that's just the beginning. We go on inventing and discovering and organizing. We cover the earth with huge structures. We pile them together in great heaps that make old Rome and Alexandria and Babylon seem almost toy-towns by comparison. The new environment, you see, is forming."

DAVID stared at him with incredulous fascination, profoundly disturbed. This was not at all what he had expected or hoped for—this almost telepathic prying into his most hidden fears. He had wanted to talk about these things—yes—but in a skeptical reassuring way. Instead, Tom sounded almost serious—mocking, but serious. David started to speak, but Tom held up his finger for silence, aping the gesture of a schoolteacher.

"Meanwhile, what's happening inside each one of us? I'll tell you. All sorts of inhibited emotions are accumulating. Fear is accumulating. Horror is accumulating. A new kind of awe at the mysteries of the universe is accumulating. A pyschological environment is forming, along with the physical one. Wait, let me finish. Our culture becomes ripe for infection. From somewhere. It's just like a bacteriologist's culture—I didn't intend the pun—when it gets to the right temperature and consistency for supporting a colony of germs. Similarly, our culture suddenly spawns a horde of demons. And, like germs, they have a peculiar affinity to our culture. They're unique. They fit in. You wouldn't

find the same kind any other time or place."

"How would we know when the infection had taken place? Say, you're taking this pretty seriously, aren't you? Well, so am I, maybe. Why, they'd haunt us, terrorize us, try to rule us. Our fears would be their fodder. A parasite-host relationship. Supernatural symbiosis. Some of us would notice them sooner than others —the sensitive ones. Some of us might see them without knowing what they were. Others might know about them without seeing them. Like me, eh?"

"What was that? I didn't catch your remark. Oh, about werewolves. Well, that's a pretty special question, but tonight I'd take a crack at anything. Yes, I think there'd be werewolves among our demons, but they wouldn't be much like the old ones. No nice clean fur, white teeth and shining eyes. Oh, no. Instead you'd get some nasty hound that wouldn't surprise you if you saw it nosing at a garbage pail or crawling out from under a truck. Frighten and terrorize you, yes. But surprise, no. It would fit into the environment. Look as if it belonged in a city, and smell the same. Because of the twisted emotions that would be its food, your emotions and mine. A matter of diet."

Tom Goodsell chuckled loudly, and lit another cigarette. But David only stared down at the scarred counter. What good would it do now to tell Tom Goodsell that his wild speculations were well on the way to becoming sober truth. Probably Tom would immediately scoff and be skeptical, but that wouldn't get around the fact that he had already agreed—agreed in partial jest perhaps, but still agreed. And Tom himself confirmed this, when, in a more serious, friendlier voice, he said:

"Oh, I know I've talked a lot of rot tonight, but still, you know, the way things are, there's something to it. At least, I can't express my feelings any other way."

They shook hands at the corner, and David rode the surging street car home through a city whose every bolt and stone seemed subtly infected, whose every noise carried shuddering overtones. His mother was waiting up for him, and after he had wearily argued with her about getting more rest and seen her off to bed, he lay sleepless himself, all through the night, like a child in a strange house, listening to each tiny noise and watching intently each changing shape taken by the shadows.

That night nothing shouldered through the door or pressed its muzzle against the window pane.

Yet he found that it cost him an effort to go down to the department store next morning, so conscious was he of the thing's presence in the faces and forms, the structures and machines around him. It was as if he were forcing himself into the heart of a monster. Detestation of the city grew within him. As yesterday the crowded aisles seemed only hiding places, and he avoided the locker room. Gertrude Rees remarked sympathetically on his fatigued look, and he took the opportunity to invite her out that evening. There seemed something normal and wholesome and familiar, something untainted about her, and his whole being demanded those qualities. Of course, he told himself, while they sat watching the movie, she wasn't very close to him. None of the girls had been close to him—a not-very-competent young man tied down to the task of supporting parents whose little reserve of money had long ago dribbled away. He had dated them for awhile, talked to them, told them his beliefs and ambitions, and then one by one they had drifted off to marry other men. But that did not change the fact that he needed the wholesomeness Gertrude could give him.

And as they walked home through the chilly night, he found himself talking

of inconsequential things and laughing at his own jokes. Then, as they turned to one another in the shadowy vestibule and she lifted her lips, he sensed her features altering queerly, lengthening. "A funny sort of light here," he thought as he took her in his arms. But the thin strip of fur on her collar grew matted and oily under his touch, her fingers grew hard and sharp against his back, he felt her teeth pushing out against her lips, and then a sharp, prickling sensation as of icy needles.

Blindly he pushed away from her, then saw—and the sight stopped him dead—that she had not changed at all, or that whatever change had been was now gone.

"What's the matter, dear?" he heard her ask startledly. "What's happened? What's that you're mumbling? Changed, you say? What's changed? Infected with it? What do you mean? For heaven's sake, don't talk that way. You've done it to me, you say? Done what?" He felt her hand on his arm, a soft hand now. "No, you're not crazy. Don't think of such things. But you're neurotic, and a little batty. For heaven's sake, pull yourself together."

"I don't know what happened to me," he managed to say, in his right voice again. Then, because he had to say something more: "My nerves all jumped, like someone had snapped them."

He expected her to be angry, but she seemed only puzzledly sympathetic, as if she liked him but had become afraid of him, as if she sensed something wrong in him beyond her powers of understanding or repair.

"Do take care of yourself," she said doubtfully. "We're all a little crazy now and then, I guess. My nerves get like wires too. Good night."

He watched her disappear up the stair. Then he turned and ran into the night.

At home his mother was waiting up again, sitting close to the hall radiator to catch its dying warmth, the inevitable shapeless bathrobe wrapped about her. Because of a new thought that had come to the forefront of his brain, he avoided her embrace and, after a few brief words, hurried off toward his room. But she followed him down the hall.

"You're not looking at all well, David," she told him anxiously, whispering because father might be asleep. "Are you sure you're not getting flu again? Don't you think you should see the doctor tomorrow?" Then she went on quickly to another subject, using that nervously apologetic tone with which he was so familiar. "I shouldn't bother you with it, David, but you must really be more careful of the bedclothes. You'd laid something greasy on the coverlet and there were big black stains on it when I went in this morning."

He was pushing open the bedroom door when she spoke, but her words halted his hand for an instant. It was only what might be expected. And how could you avoid the thing by going one place rather than another?

"And one thing more," she added, as he switched on the lights. "Will you try to get some cardboard tomorrow to black out the windows? They're out of it at the stores around here and the radio says we should be ready."

"Yes, I will. Good night, mother."

"Oh, and something else," she persisted, lingering uneasily just beyond the door. "That really must be a dead rat in the walls. The smell keeps coming in waves. I spoke to the real estate agent, but he hasn't done anything about it. I wish you'd speak to him again."

"Yes. Good night, mother."

He waited until he heard her door softly close.

Then he went over to the dresser to examine his lips in the mirror, lifting aside the lampshade to get a brighter light. On the lower lip were two tiny white spots. Each felt distinctly numb to the touch, as if

it were frozen. That much confirmed, he lit a cigarette and slumped down on the bed to try to think as clearly as he could about something to which science and everyday ideas could not be applied.

QUESTION ONE (and he realized with an ironic twinge that it sounded melodramatic enough for a dime-novel): Was Gertrude Rees what might be called for want of a better term, a werewolf? Answer: Almost certainly not, in any ordinary sense of the word. What had momentarily come to her had almost certainly been something he had communicated to her. It had happened because of his presence. And either his own shock had interrupted the transformation or else Gertrude Rees had not proved a suitable vehicle of incarnation for the thing.

Question Two: Might he not communicate the thing to some other person? Answer: Yes. For a moment his thinking paused, as there swept before his mind's eye kaleidoscope visions of the faces which might, without warning, begin to change in his presence: His mother, his father, Tom Goodsell, the prim-mouthed real estate agent, a customer at the store, a panhandler whom he would chance to meet in the street on a rainy night.

Question Three: Was there any escape from the thing? Answer: No. And yet—there was one bare possibility. Escape from the city. The city had bred the thing; might it not be chained to the city? It hardly seemed to be a reasonable possibility; how could a supernatural entity be tied down to one locality? And yet—He stepped quickly to the window and, after a moment's hesitation, jerked it up. Sounds which had been temporarily blotted out by his thinking now poured past him in quadrupled volume, mixing together discordantly like instruments tuning up for some titanic symphony—the racking surge of street car and elevated, the coughing of a locomotive in the yards, the hum of tires on asphalt and the growl of engines, the mumbling of radio voices, the faint mournful note of distant horns. But now they were no longer separate sounds. They all issued from one cavernous throat—a single moan, infinitely penetrating, infinitely menacing. He slammed down the window and put his hands to his ears. He switched out the light and threw himself on the bed, burying his head in the pillows. Still the sound came through. And it was then he realized that ultimately, whether he wanted to or not, the thing would drive him from the city. The moment would come when the sound would begin to penetrate too deeply, to reverberate too unendurably in his ears.

The sight of so many faces, trembling on the brink of an almost unimaginable change, would become too much for him. And he would leave whatever he was doing and go away.

That moment came a little after four o'clock next afternoon. He could not say what sensation it was that, adding its pressure to the rest, drove him to take the step. Perhaps it was a heaving movement in the rack of dresses two counters away; perhaps it was the snoutlike appearance momentarily taken by a crumpled piece of cloth. Whatever it was, he slipped out from behind the counter without a word, leaving a customer to mutter indignantly, and walked up the stair and out into the street, moving almost like a sleepwalker yet constantly edging from side to side to avoid any direct contact with the crowd engulfing him. Once in the street, he took the first car that came by, never noting its number, and found himself an empty place in the corner of the front platform.

With ominous slowness at first, then with increasing rapidity, the heart of the city was left behind. A great gloomy bridge spanning an oily river was passed over, and the frowning cliffs of the build-

ings grew lower. Warehouses gave way to factories, factories to apartment buildings, apartment buildings to dwellings which were at first small and dirty white, then large and mansion-like but very much decayed, then new and monotonous in their uniformity. Peoples of different economic status and racial affiliations filed into and emptied from the street car as the different strata of the city were passed through. Finally the vacant lots began to come, at first one by one, then in increasing numbers, until the houses were spaced out two or three to a block.

"End of the line," sang out the conductor, and without hesitation David swung down from the platform and walked on in the same direction that the street car had been going. He did not hurry. He did not lag. He moved as an automaton that had been wound up and set going, and will not stop until it runs down.

The sun was setting smokily red in the west. He could not see it because of a tree-fringed rise ahead, but its last rays winked at him from the window panes of little houses blocks off to right and left, as if flaming lights had been lit inside. As he moved they flashed on and off like signals. Two blocks further on the sidewalk ended, and he walked down the center of a muddy lane. After passing a final house, the lane also came to an end, giving way to a narrow dirt path between high weeds. The path led up the rise and through the fringe of trees. Emerging on the other side, he slowed his pace and finally stopped, so bewilderingly fantastic was the scene spread out before him. The sun had set, but high cloud-banks reflected its light, giving a spectral glow to the landscape.

IMMEDIATELY before him stretched the equivalent of two or three empty blocks, but beyond that began a strange realm that seemed to have been plucked from another climate and another geological system and set down here outside the city. There were strange trees and shrubs, but, most striking of all, great uneven blocks of reddish stone which rose from the earth at unequal intervals and culminated in a massive central eminence fifty or sixty feet high.

And as he gazed, the light drained from the landscape, as if a cloak had been flipped over the earth, and in the sudden twilight there rose from somewhere in the region ahead a faint howling, mournful and sinister, but in no way allied to the other howling that had haunted him day and night. Once again he moved forward, but now he moved impulsively toward the source of the new sound.

A small gate in a high wire fence pushed open, giving him access to the realm of rocks. He found himself following a gravel path between thick shrubs and trees. At first it seemed quite dark, in contrast to the open land behind him. And with every step he took, the hollow howling grew closer. He felt as though he were walking through a dream world. Finally the path turned abruptly around a shoulder of rock, and he found himself at the sound's source.

A ditch of rough stone about eight feet wide and of a similar depth separated him from a space overgrown with short, brownish vegetation and closely surrounded on the other three sides by precipitous rocky walls in which the dark mouths of two or three caves showed. In the center of the open space were gathered a half dozen white-furred canine figures, their muzzles pointing toward the sky, giving voice to the mournful cry that had drawn him here.

It was only when he felt the low iron fence against his knees and made out the neat little sign reading, ARTIC WOLVES, that he realized where he must be—in the

famous zoological gardens which he had heard about but never visited, where the animals were kept in as nearly natural conditions as was feasible. Looking around, he noted the outlines of two or three low inconspicuous buildings, and some distance away he could see the form of a uniformed guard silhouetted against a patch of sky. Evidently he had come in after hours, and through an auxiliary gate that probably should have been locked.

Swinging around again, he stared with casual curiosity at the wolves. The turn of events had the effect of making him feel stupid and bewildered, and for a long time he pondered dully as to why he should find these animals unalarming and even attractive.

Perhaps it was because they were so much a part of the wild, so little of the city. That great brute there, for example, the biggest of the lot, who had come forward to the edge of the ditch to stare back at him. He seemed an incarnation of primitive strength. His fur so creamy white—well, perhaps not so white; it seemed darker than he had thought at first, streaked with black—or was that due to the fading light? But at least his eyes were clear and clean, shining faintly like jewels in the gathering dark. But no, they weren't clean; their reddish gleam was thickening, scumming over, until they looked more like two tiny peep-holes in the walls of hell. And why hadn't he noticed before that the creature was obviously malformed? And why should the other wolves draw away from it and snarl as if afraid?

Then the brute licked its black tongue across its greasy jowls, and from its throat came a faint familiar growl that had in it nothing of the wild, and David Lashley knew that before him crouched the monster of his dreams, finally made flesh and blood.

With a choked scream he turned and fled blindly down the gravel path that led between thick shrubs to the little gate, fled in panic across empty blocks, stumbling in the uneven ground and twice falling. When he reached the fringe of trees he looked back, to see a low, lurching form emerge from the gate. Even at this distance he could tell that the eyes were those of no animal.

It was dark in the trees, and dark in the lane beyond. Ahead the street lamps glowed, and there were lights in houses. A pang of helpless terror gripped him when he saw there was no street car waiting, until he realized—and the realization was like the onset of insanity—that nothing whatever in the city promised him refuge. This—everything that lay ahead—was the thing's hunting ground. It was driving him in toward its lair for the kill.

THEN he ran, ran with the hopeless terror of a victim in the arena of a rabbit loosed before greyhounds, ran until his sides were walls of pain and his gasping throat seemed aflame, and then still ran Over mud, dirt, and brick, and then onto the endless sidewalks. Past the neat suburban dwellings which in their uniformity seemed like monoliths lining some avenue of doom. The streets were almost empty, and those few people he passed stared at him as at a madman.

Brighter lights came into view, a corner with two or three stores. There he paused to look back. For a moment he saw nothing. Then it emerged from the shadows a block behind him, loping unevenly with long strides that carried it forward with a rush, its matted fur shining oilily under a street lamp. With a croaking sob he turned and ran on.

The thing's howling seemed suddenly to increase a thousandfold, becoming a pulsating wail, a screaming ululation that seemed to blanket the whole city with sound. And as that demonaic screeching continued, the

lights in the houses began to go out one by one. Then the streetlights vanished in a rush, and an approaching street car was blotted out, and he knew that the sound did not come altogether or directly from the thing. This was the long-predicted blackout.

He ran on with arms outstretched, feeling rather than seeing intersections as he approached them, misjudging his step at curbs, tripping and falling flat, picking himself up to stagger on half-stunned. His diaphragm contracted to a knot of pain that tied itself tighter and tighter. Breath rasped like a file in his throat. There seemed no light in the whole world, for the clouds had gathered thicker and thicker ever since sunset. No light, except those twin points of dirty red in the blackness behind.

A solid edge of darkness struck him down, inflicting pain on his shoulder and side. He scrambled up. Then a second solid obstacle in his path smashed him full in the face and chest. This time he did not rise. Dazed, tortured by exhaustion, motionless, he waited its approach.

First a padding of footsteps, with the faint scraping of claws on cement. Then a sniffling and a snuffling. Then a sickening stench. Then a glimpse again, of red eyes. And then the thing was upon him, its weight pinning him down, its jaws thrusting at his throat. Instinctively his hand went up, and his forearm was clamped by teeth whose icy sharpness stung through the layers of cloth, while a foul oily fluid splattered on his face.

At that moment light flooded upon them, and he was aware of a malformed muzzle retreating into the blackness, and of weight lifted from him. Then silence and cessation of movement. Nothing, nothing at all—except the light flooding down. As consciousness and sanity teetered in his brain, his eyes found the source of light, a glaring white disk only a few feet away. A flashlight, but nothing visible in the blackness behind it. For what seemed an eternity, there was no change in the situation—himself supine and exposed upon the ground in the unwavering circle of light.

Then a voice from the darkness, the voice of a man paralyzed by horror and supernatural fear. "God, God, God," over and over again. Each word dragged out with prodigious effort.

An unfamiliar sensation stirred in David, a feeling almost of security and relief though he could never have told why.

"You—saw it then?" he heard issue from his own dry throat. "The hound? The—wolf?"

"Wolf? Hound?" The voice from behind the flashlight was hideously shaken. "It was nothing like that. God, I never believed in such things. But now—" Then the voice spoke out with awful certainty and conviction. "It was— It was something from the factories of hell." Then it broke, became earthly once more. "Good grief, a man, we must get you inside."

Then consciousness drained away.

But as it came back to him in the house to which he had been taken, he still felt that same almost tranquil sensation he had experienced when listening to the man's words. With an effort he raised his arm, shaking his head when they tried to restrain him, and by the flickering candlelight he looked at the marks of the thing —hugh, deep pocks which had indented the flesh of his forearm for as much as half an inch without breaking the skin, each white and cold and numb to the touch. Yes, it was all true, he told himself, true beyond the possibility of disproof. But now he was no longer the only one who knew, the only one who feared, the only potential victim. There was danger, terrible danger, incredible danger, a danger big enough to shatter reality. But it was danger shared.

The Crooked House

A house that's capable of murder . . . and it was willed to me!

By THORNE LEE

IT TAKES all kinds of houses to make a world, I suppose—even houses that are capable of murder.

Heaven knows, I didn't want to inherit Rydell Oaks. It was a misshapen creature of a house that should never have been built. My brother, Garson, was the designer, and like Frankenstein's monster his

house turned upon him and killed him.

Dr. Rascob saw my brother die. Garson Rydell grew old in a single week, right before the doctor's eyes. His flesh withered, his hair greyed, and life dried up in his veins—the process of years condensed into a few hours. He had just passed his thirtieth year, but Dr. Rascob would have staked his reputation that Garson Rydell died of old age!

The doctor could not understand it. I can understand it now. Garson lived a year at Rydell Oaks before he died. It was the house that made him old before his time.

And Garson willed the house to me!

RANDALL BAUDER was the second man to live at Rydell Oaks. There were no secrets about the place. I told him how my brother died. I told him that I was afraid of the place, as a man is afraid of the dark for a reason which he cannot understand, some dark memory buried in his forgotten boyhood. But Randall was the sort of chap who would be happy to inherit a ghost.

For six months Randall rented the estate, staged the lavish parties for which he was famous, and never complained.

On the seventh month in place of his regular check I received a terse note, which said: "You are an excellent and generous landlord, Avery. You mind your own business. I like that. But please explain why you have rented the house to another party without my knowledge. It is a very uncomfortable situation, sharing the house with another family. The lady is wonderful, but you might have introduced me formally. Her husband is a devil! Will you straighten out this matter at once? Come up for the week-end. Randall.

I asked Dr. Rascob to drive out with me Friday evening. The thin, shriveled little doctor had been the family friend and adviser for two generations.

We needled our way through the heavy traffic of the Coast Highway. By the time we reached the foothills moist fingers of fog slithered around our headlights like the tentacles of an octopus.

"I am not happy," I muttered, poking the sedan cautiously through that boiling gray scum. "If Randall is pulling a joke, I'm going to be damned sore! I didn't rent that house to another party. I've never even considered it!"

"It's very strange," the doctor admitted. "I have never yet heard of anyone moving into the wrong house, but I suppose it can happen."

"As far as that goes, there's room for three or four families at the Oaks," I said.

"Why did your brother waste his fortune building such a monstrous place? Did he ever explain it to you?"

Groping back in my memory was like probing through that blanket of fog. "I think he did," I mused, "but I was too young to remember. He was almost a generation older than I, y'know. He died so young!"

"So young!" echoed Dr. Rascob. "I wish I was sure of that."

"So do I. They told me he died of a mysterious malady. Malady, hell!" I sneered. "It was the house! It's like an evil disease, that place. The house killed him!"

THE doctor swung around to study my tight face and twitching cheeks. "Nonsense, Avery!" he snorted.

"No, no! I believe that!" I insisted. "Doctor, can you imagine a place in this world where time does not exist, where life does not move forward or backward but in a kind of revolving cycle, like a roulette wheel?"

"Whatever made you think of a thing like that?"

"I don't know, exactly," I admitted. "I believe it was something Garson told me before he died. I was so young. Sometimes I get to thinking about time, how

slow it moves—like a millwheel. But what if it were suddenly speeded up? What if it became a terrific tornado sweeping us out of existence. Remember, Doctor—you told me yourself! Garson Rydell lived only a year at the Oaks, and yet in that year he grew to be an old man!"

The two great oaks guarding the Rydell driveway loomed in the fog like massive staring heads with long hanks of hair standing stiffly on end. Old Bixby, Randall's only servant, waved us into the garage with a flashlight.

The house was a sprawling black island in the sea of fog. A solitary light gleamed from the library windows. Bixby showed us the way, and we found Randall Bauder there, his long striped pajama legs dangling over a chair arm.

I stared down at him in the hard light. He had been dozing, and his head lifted wearily to greet us. There was a moment before he moved that he seemed to be an inhuman thing, a kind of plaster model of himself, like a man who has mummified while he slept.

THE doctor noticed it, too. Every line, every crease in Randall's face had lengthened and deepened, as though time had been hacking away at it with a chisel.

"Glad to see you," he said, and his face came alive again when he pulled his long body out of the chair.

Randall was a handsome, keen-eyed fellow with a shock of thick black hair. I wondered if the gray streaks were really there, or just some trick of the smoky light.

He waved us to chairs, and I noticed the slightly bored look of the wealthy sportsman was missing. Instead his eyes and hands were shifty, restless. He kept peering over our shoulders as if he expected someone to appear.

Dr. Rascob perched on his chair, toying with his tiny gray mustache, studying Randall.

I didn't waste time. "What sort of stunt is this?" I demanded.

"Stunt?" he repeated.

"That letter of yours," I said. "What did you mean by it?"

He frowned. "On the contrary, Avery—what did you mean by it? It isn't like you to rent the place without even giving me notice."

"What nonsense is this?" I exploded. "I haven't rented this house to anyone else?"

One thin eyebrow cocked up, skeptically. "Oh, come now, Avery. Don't try to duck out like that. The lady says she rented it from you personally."

"What lady? What the devil—"

"Are you trying to tell me that you have never seen these people?"

"I'm telling you that I have never talked to anyone about renting this house, never so much as thought about it!" I snapped. "If there's someone making such a claim, I wish you would produce him!"

Randall's eyes flashed. "I will! I'll get them down here right now. We'll have this thing settled tonight!"

He was gone up the stairs in a bound.

"By George, he's not joking. He's got someone here all right!" I muttered.

We both moved to the library doorway when a door slammed overhead. Randall appeared, drifting down the long curved stairway, which seemed to flow out of the upper darkness like a winding, sluggish stream.

At the foot he turned back, facing the stairs.

"Have you people met Avery Rydell, or haven't you?" he demanded coldly.

Dr. Rascob and I stared upward. Sweat broke out on my face. The stairway and the upper hall were empty.

OF COURSE we had to tell Randall that there was no one in the house. He wouldn't believe us at first. How can you

possibly convince a man that he is suffering a delusion?

For a while Randall was nasty, almost ferocious about it, but Dr. Rascob's psychology was brilliant, and he finally soothed the patient. The doctor insisted it was only a temporary mental derangement, definitely curable.

I was not pleased with Dr. Rascob's suggestion that I move in with Randall for a while, but I had no choice. Any man can be a coward, but only an extraordinary man will admit it.

My peace of mind was not improved next morning when I talked with Bixby. The tall, hook-shouldered old fellow had been a butler so long that I don't think he ever had a thought of his own. His mind worked mechanically, turning off and on at his master's wish.

"No, sir, I haven't seen the other people, sir," he told me. "Mr. Bauder likes me to keep close to my own quarters when he don't need me, but I must say, sir, they do make a mess of my kitchen, the new folks."

"How's that?" I snapped. "Randall doesn't use the kitchen."

"Only on parties, sir. We have in the catering people to help us then. But I keep an eye on things, I do, and nothing's like it was since the new ones came."

"You mean the utensils have actually been used?" I said.

"Yes, sir. That they have. I don't rightly think they would move around by themselves."

"You too, Bixby?" I groaned. "Well, I'll be damned!"

This was a new angle. It was too much to believe that two men in a house were suffering the same delusion.

I found Randall moping in the library and dragged him out to breakfast at the local hotel. We sat through the meal scowling at each other.

"Randall, I have a theory," I said suddenly. "Would you mind describing that lady to me—the one who's been haunting you?"

His face brightened. "It's a pleasure! She would be about shoulder high to you, Avery. Very beautiful, but she has a manner of melting into the scene. Shy, she seems. Her skin is white as—as a ghost, I guess. Very odd style of make-up she uses, too. I've never seen anything like it; under certain lights it makes the face as radiant as a sunset. And her hair! Well, that's really something out of this world! Instead of pouring down around her shoulders, it flows up from her head like water running up-hill. It's a fountain of gold!"

"Wonderful!" I breathed. "Y'know, Randall, I don't entirely agree with Dr. Rascob. I think the real source of your mystery is that house. Here's my theory: You've lived at the Oaks for six months. This phantom, or whatever it is that you see, is visible only to people who have lived there—*who have come under the strange influence of the house!* I say the mystery is some illusion—a kind of mirage—created by the house itself!"

Randall clutched suddenly at my hands. "Bixby! I never thought to ask the old boy. What about Bixby? I've told him about these people, but has he seen them—?"

I shook my head. "I asked him this morning. He's seen nothing, but he does complain about misplaced utensils."

"That's it!" Randall was on his feet yanking me up by the shoulders. "You see, Avery. If another man can be aware of it, then it's not in my mind. It's something real—something that lives in that house!"

I looked long at his gleaming, sunken eyes. If there was insanity in them, I couldn't see it.

"I think I'll stick around," I said. "If this girl is as lovely as you say, I'd like to be haunted myself!"

Randall sighed deeply. He squeezed my arms until they ached.

MY VISIT ran over into the second week. Fascinated, I watched Randall Bauder gradually display all the symptoms of a lunatic, although his face and eyes were sane. Finally, when he began to talk and gesture to himself, I cornered him in the great vault of a salon.

I had paced off that salon more than once, and it was only ordinary size, but somehow it gave the impression of vast space. You can look into a well and it seems utterly bottomless until a dropping stone wrinkles the water into life, and so this room seemed limitless until persons moved in it to give it perspective. The furniture was a collection from many parts of the world, and it ranged in style as far back as early Egyptian. That was part of my brother's absurd idea of architecture and design. He seemed to have crowded all of space and time into a single room.

I pushed Randall in a Louis XIV chair and towered over him to the limit of my six feet. "You've really got it bad, brother," I said. "Did you know that you're actually talking to yourself?"

His feverish eyes gleamed. "Really?" he gasped. "Did you hear me? When?"

"Yesterday. The day before. It's getting to be a regular routine."

"The hell it is! What did I say, Avery?" I pondered. "There was one queer moment right in this room. You were facing my chair here, just as you are now. I was standing on the curve of the stairway which offers a direct view. I distinctly heard you say, 'This is my home. There must be a mistake. I've lived here for months. Not that you aren't welcome. In fact, if you would just sit there for a half hour and let me look at you, I'd happily hand over my keys to you—' "

Randall's maniacal shriek cut me short. "Avery, I remember that! I remember every word of it! Then, I have found her, Avery. I've talked to her. She's here in this house!"

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "You were talking to an empty chair. You've simply let this mental illusion take hold of your imagination."

"But she answered me, Avery! We carried on a regular conversation. I thought it was just my crazy illusion again, but this proves it was real!"

Fiercely, I shook him until his teeth chattered. "Shut up, you fool!" I hissed, and sweat broke out on my face at the stupid, groping look of him. "There can't be any girl, really. It's madness!"

He rose stiffly. "I think you're getting a little jealous of me, Avery. Maybe you should leave."

"Like hell, I'll leave, and let you beat out your brains on the furniture! Next thing you'll be making love to the lounge!"

I stormed into the hallway and phoned Dr. Rascob. "Get over here in a hurry, Doc," I snapped. "This thing is getting beyond me."

I WALKED out to the end of the long, oak-lined drive to meet the doctor. The disc of the setting sun was balanced on a black mountain peak—a red ball on the nose of a seal.

At a curve of the road, I swung back to face the house. My knees suddenly gave way in sheer panic.

Rydell Mansion was gone and in its place was a tortured skeleton of a house! Only a few blackened stumps of the framework were standing, as though the whole sprawling structure had been blasted into ruin by a single, soundless explosion. Some tangent of my brain issued orders to weakened legs, and I staggered back along the road. I ran faster as reason seemed to pump back into my mind. At the edge of the vast carpet of green lawn I came to a stunned halt.

"What—?" I gasped. The house was still there, exactly as it had ever been. Old Bixby was clipping rosebuds in the arbor.

My mind couldn't grasp an explanation. I just sank into the grass and waited for Dr. Rascob.

The doctor noticed my trouble when his gray sedan pulled up beside me. "Who's the sick man here?" he asked, pulling me to my feet.

"Watch your step, Doc," I muttered. "This house creeps up on you. It's a monster, damn it, a monster!"

"What's happened to Randall?"

"He's babbling," I said, leaning heavily on the doctor. "Thinks he's found his girl, and goes around talking to empty furniture!"

Before we reached the salon, I cautioned, "Let's try to avoid Randall until you've had time to observe him in action. He might clam shut, if he suspected he was watched."

"What do you suggest?"

"I'd like to have a look at his den on the second floor," I said. "It belonged to my brother once. I've been afraid to look in it by myself."

IT WAS not difficult to trace Randall to the library, where he was drinking himself into a stupor. We left him alone and slipped furtively up the stairway.

I stepped first into the den, took one look, and whirled frantically toward the doctor. My breath whistled out in a long gasp.

The doctor studied me shrewdly. "What is it?" he said.

"The sight of this room stirred an old memory," I explained. "I thought for a moment that it was Garson, my brother, standing behind me. Thank heaven it was you!"

We sat down in semi-darkness. I had lost all enthusiasm for exploring. As twilight deepened, the walls of the small den gradually moved out of range of my sight, giving the impression that the room was expanding like a tremendous balloon and leaving us in the center of a vast well of space.

"Do you feel anything?" I asked suddenly.

The doctor laughed. "Am I supposed to?"

"How long have we been sitting here?"

"About five minutes, I guess," he said. The flame of a lighter spurted between his fingers, splashed the vague walls with bars of light. I heard the doctor give a soft cry. "It's impossible!"

"What?" I demanded.

"My watch says eleven o'clock!"

My trembling fingers dragged a watch out of my vest. "That's right! Why, that would be six hours!"

"It can't be!" insisted the doctor. "Come with me."

The two of us groped into the black hallway, hand in hand, and felt our way down the endless, twisting staircase. At the last bend in the stairway we both stiffened. Light boiled out of the salon in a blue mist. I smelled tobacco fumes. Randall stood alone beside a low Regency couch, but his attitude was appalling. His arms were looped wide in front of his rigid body and his head bent forward, the lips pressing downward. His body swayed slightly, for all the world as if he held a slender woman in his arms and was kissing her passionately!

At that very moment his head jerked sideways and he sprawled to the couch as though he had been struck a heavy blow. He staggered slowly to his feet and spoke to someone out of sight in the darkened hall below us.

"You don't understand!" Randall gasped.

There was a horrid pause, but no one answered.

"It was not her fault! I am to blame!" Randall went on.

Still that awful silence in response.

"Punish me!" Randall pleaded. "I

forced myself upon her. I don't belong here. I know that now."

Moving in unison, Dr. Rascob and I crept slowly down the stairs.

"Don't shoot!" Randall choked, panic in his voice.

"Come on!" I hissed.

I caught one glimpse of Randall's lunging body before I lost sight of the salon door. Tumbling recklessly down the lower half of the stairway, the doctor and I piled in a heap at the bottom. We both had heard a dreadful, faint spat, spat, and then the thud of a falling body.

Dr. Rascob reached Randall's body first. He rolled it over and I stared for a moment at the ghastly blue face. Then I saw two tiny holes in the white shirt-front. Some thick, scorched stuff that was more like red powder than blood oozed slowly out of them.

I whirled with a roar and dashed along the dark corridor. I gripped a chair and hurled it wildly into the blackness at the murderer who lurked there. There was a splintering crash, silence, and then a low sobbing which seemed to come from my own throat.

IT WAS only the presence of Dr. Rascob and the absence of a weapon that saved me from a charge of murder. I believe the local townspeople have always been suspicious of me since the case was abandoned.

The circumstances were damning: No signs of any persons whatsoever in the house except Bixby, Dr. Rascob, and myself. The murderer had safely hidden not only himself but the gun which fired those fatal shots.

Young Sheriff Stone was the most puzzled man of all. I became quite friendly with him during the investigation. A month later he told me the final summary of the most amazing case he had ever studied.

Thin, sharp-eyed, the sheriff faced me sternly across his desk, and said, "We're letting you go, Rydell. Our police system hasn't much imagination. We can't understand how a man could have two bullet-holes in him, and no signs of the bullets, or the gun, or the man who fired it. As far as we have been able to determine there is no gun in existence capable of killing a man as Randall Bauder was killed; the best we could do was to turn up a remote inventor on the other side of the continent who claims to be in the process of inventing such a gun! There has never been such a deadly instrument known to science. I couldn't describe those wounds to you in my own words!

"What kind of bullet is it that penetrates a man's heart and then dissolves itself into his flowing blood? We can't figure it out, Rydell; so we're bound to close the case without a verdict."

After my release, I paid only one final visit to Rydell house. It would be sealed shut, I decided. There was no use attempting to rent a place with two black marks on its reputation. My brother had died from a fantastic malady. Randall Bauder was murdered by a killer who did not seem to exist. Two mysterious deaths in a house are enough to put it in permanent quarantine.

I don't know what possessed me to make that final inspection of the house before boarding it up, or what mysterious guide led me that afternoon to the room that had been Randall Bauder's den, and my brother Garson's study.

I shuddered unnaturally when I pushed through the door. My eyes were slow in becoming accustomed to the light which filtered through drawn blinds. I heard the door click behind me. Then I saw the man sitting behind the desk, and I turned and tore frantically at the knob which had suddenly become useless.

"Sit down, Avery," said a dreadfully familiar voice. "There is nothing to fear."

Automatically, I drifted to a chair in the

corner. I sat paralyzed. I could say nothing. I dared not look down at my own body for fear I would find the trembling limbs of a little boy. I realized suddenly that I was listening to a memory which had haunted me for nearly twenty years.

It was my brother who sat behind the low desk. I could only gulp and stare at him. His black brow was lifted in a weird slant, and one round, popping eye dangled in its socket, regarding me from every angle. Garson Rydell had always looked and acted like a caricature of a man. His tall, grotesque body moved in great heaves and leaps, and he loved to sit in ugly, twisted postures like a performing monkey.

Perhaps my parents were to blame for Garson's streak of the fantastic. Mother wanted her eldest to be a minister, and Father wanted a scientist; so Garson compromised by being neither. He became a rather bewildered cross between inventor and philosopher, with the imagination of an artist. He finally settled on architecture, and built only one house!

This was the day that I, Avery Rydell, his little brother, had seen Garson's house for the first time. I sensed rather than saw the strangeness in it.

Garson was trying to explain. Although he was born almost a generation before my time, he always spoke to me as though I were his own age. The memory of his hoarse, croaking voice was perfectly real:

"You will be one hell of a good, solid citizen, Avery; but I am a fool who can't let things be. Whatever happens to me, always try to keep your good, earthly sanity, and you'll be safe enough."

"What's going to happen to you, Garson?" I heard myself whispering.

"Oh," he said carelessly, "some day I'll become the victim of my own mad imagination. I'm glad that Father never lived to see how I've used his money. Sometime this house may belong to you; so I hope you will never be afraid of it—ever."

"A-afraid?" I quavered.

"It's different, Avery. In fact, 'different' hardly describes it. It is, you might say, a mathematical phenomenon. I'll try to explain. You won't understand now, but later it will come to you like a sudden shock, and you will understand.

"Listen closely, Avery, and try to remember: Do you know what we mean by 'space'? Most men always think of space as being confined by six basic walls or sides—that is, the four directions like north, east, south, west, or their variations, plus the up side and the down side. Look, I'll act it out with this twig I've been chewing. This is me, except that I'm not quite so lumpy."

I smiled weakly at the knobby, twisted stick.

"Now," Garson went on, "wherever I happen to face, I am standing in a natural cube with right, left, front, back, top, and bottom sides. All right, I take a look around and I discover that there is one direction I have overlooked. Can you see it?"

"No," I murmured.

He shook his great, shaggy head. "Well, suffice it to say that I have proved that time and space are not separate quantities, as science has always believed." His voice suddenly thickened with excitement. "Time is a part of space! It is the seventh side!"

"See!" he cried. "I am this stick. I move myself up and down, back and forth, around a circle. All the while my position changes in respect to the six sides of space that surround me. Well, where was time while all this happened? Has not my position also changed in regard to time?"

I struggled to make an intelligent, grown-up answer. "Time isn't like a wall, Garson. You can back away from a wall. You can't back away from time."

He snapped the stick, and flipped the fragments at me. "Pretty smart, for a boy; but you are wrong. Science has missed that point for centuries. They've got time

marked up as a one-way street, but it isn't at all.

"Listen!" he hissed, leaping to his feet. "My house has seven sides! That is all I can tell you, because it is all you will understand. I have taken the element, *time*, and built it into the structure of this house! What do you think of my house, Avery?"

"It's crooked, Garson!" I cried. "You look at it, and it's crooked!"

My brother threw back his great, ugly head and roared. "Yes, it's a crooked house," he said, and I could still hear the echo of his laugh when I slipped into the hallway, and down the long, endless stairway, and out into the deep afternoon shadows.

I had never been so frightened. I didn't stop running until I reached the crook of the drive. When I looked back, I could plainly see a great black coach drawn up at the door of the house, and six men were carrying a flat wooden box on their shoulders and putting it in the coach.

"Garson! Garson!" I wailed in terror, but I kept on running away from him.

Somewhere on the long hike back to my cottage at Ocean Villa I realized that I was not a little boy who could run away from fear. I was a grown man, Avery Rydell, who had been tricked by an old memory, but I knew now why I had always been afraid of my brother's house; for that day, years ago, after listening to Garson's explanation of his house, I had looked back from the long drive and I had seen my brother's coffin carried away, and a year later my brother died.

AFTER that encounter with a twisted memory in my brother's study, I stayed clear of Rydell House. Occasionally I would have the place cleaned, out of respect for Garson, but I doubt that I would ever have consented to rent it again, if my income had not begun to dwindle. Like so many sons of wealthy men, I had always considered my Father's success quite enough for two generations. As a result I was beginning to feel the pinch in my late thirties.

During a period of ten years I turned down or scared away a dozen renters, but I finally found a man of such a terrifying manner that I decided he would surely frighten anything more than it could possibly frighten him. He was a European, not very large, but his face displayed the sleek, calm viciousness of a Doberman Pinscher. The thin, pointed strands of his mustache curled and snapped on his lips, accenting the whiplike sting of his works.

He laughed outright when I told him the morbid history of Rydell Oaks. "If every home must be idle because two men had died in it," he said, "we should have a world of vacant houses!"

And so Rydell House became the home of Verni Mauselle and his wife. I often wondered what kind of she-wolf would be the companion of such a man.

TO MY surprise I received a letter from the lady herself within a month, and the same evening I paused once more on the threshold of Rydell House, cold panic fingering my throat.

The door finally drifted open and a woman stood there, a long black gown churning around her body in the draft. Against somber shadows of the hallway her face stood out like a rare jewel. She was very young and very pale, but the rich coloring of her painted cheeks contrasted nicely with the dazzling gold of her hair.

I might have gone on staring for hours. "You're Mr. Rydell?" she questioned cautiously.

I muttered a vague answer and followed her into the salon, awed by the graceful flow of her supple young body.

I toppled from full height, sinking deep in a luxurious divan. The lady's red lips quivered with a smile.

"Have I alarmed you?" she asked, sitting beside me.

I recovered myself. "I'm a bit shocked," I confessed. "Haven't I seen you before?"

"I think not," she said.

I spoke boldly: "Of course I know you! You're the woman I should have married, but never met."

She did not blush. Instead she leaned toward me, trembling, and although it sounds utterly mad I suddenly gripped her shoulders and kissed her like a man possessed.

She did not draw away. For a long timeless moment her lips clung warmly to my own.

"Why did we do that?" she whispered finally.

"I'm sorry," I said. "For just a flash it seemed as though you really were my wife, and this was a perfectly natural thing to do."

HER voice was awed, husky. "Do you know, I felt the same thing. It seemed so perfectly right. I hope you don't think—"

"I think you are a very wonderful lady," I said simply. "Knowing you for a single moment is like having known you for a lifetime!"

She sighed. "Well, this seems a queer way of getting down to business, but I really asked you here for a purpose."

"Yes?"

"My husband is—er—rather strong-minded in certain matters. He wouldn't hear of your coming; so I had to see you privately. I don't think he will disturb us."

Her long, gold lashes fanned wide, and the blue eyes studied me. "Who is the other person that lives in this house?" she asked.

I gaped at her.

"I know there is someone making use of this house," she went on quickly. "There are signs that can't escape a woman's eye. Why, I remember—"

"You *remember?*" The word seemed to stir my own memory.

"Distinctly," she replied. "Yesterday I thought I saw someone here in this room. I was standing on the stairway, but I didn't have the courage to speak. He was gone when I finally came down."

I swallowed unhappily. "Did your husband tell you anything about the house?" I asked. "It has a gruesome history, I'm afraid."

"Every fine old house has its ghost legends," she said.

"I have seen this house in action, and it is not a healthy place," I said. "Now that I have seen you, I wish that you would leave—immediately! My darling—I mean, Irene, you must get out of this house at once!"

She gasped: "My name! How did you know my name?"

I pressed my head between my hands. "I don't know! Anything unbelievable can happen in this house. I tell you, anything can happen!"

Desperately I seized her hands and started to draw her toward me, but she shrank back. "Don't ever kiss me again. Please!" she pleaded. "I'm afraid. My husband is insanely jealous. He—"

Her eyes bloated with horror, and I swung around. Verni Mauselle stood in the corridor by the staircase, his lips curled back from his teeth.

Irene gave a feeble laugh. "I was just telling Mr. Rydell about that man in the house, Verni. I thought he might be able to solve the mystery."

Mauselle advanced stiffly. "Oh, I'm sure Mr. Rydell has soothed your fears, my dear, and I think we can promise that there will never be another man to annoy you in this house. Eh, Rydell?"

Awkwardly, I released the lady's fingers and rose to my feet. "I—I hope so," I mumbled. "However, you are aware of my angle on the place. If Madame is really

annoyed, I hope you'll feel free to cancel our terms at any time."

He squeezed his wife's arm until she winced. "Oh, we are very happy here. The perfect couple, aren't we, my dear?"

"Yes, yes," she echoed hastily.

I bowed out of the house, shuddering with rage and bafflement. How could she have married that vicious fellow? What could I ever do about it? It was like falling in love with a beautiful picture that would be held forever in the cold embrace of an ugly black frame.

IT WAS a week at least before I saw Dr. Rascob—the first time in years. The smiling wrinkles in his round cheeks had become permanent ruts, but shrewdness still flashed from his darting bird-eyes. I told him everything that he had not known about Rydell House, ending with the most recent chapter. "I can't go near her," I said. "There's no telling what that man Mauselle might be capable of."

"Murder, perhaps," suggested the doctor, and I saw that he was studying an old almanac. His finger traced across a calendar on his desk. Abruptly, he leaped to his feet. "I wonder what could have brought you to me today? Avery, the pieces of your puzzle are gradually slipping into place. We must go to Rydell Oaks at once! A life may be at stake!"

"We can't. I know that kind of man. Jealousy clouds all reason out of his mind."

"Avery, I've never thought of you as a coward," the doctor said softly, "but you do a wonderful imitation of one. What do you care for a man like that, if you're really in love with this woman?"

"I was thinking of her," I protested.

"I know. So am I. Come on!"

I couldn't follow the doctor's reasoning, but I raced my sedan up the slippery, rain-sudded highway as if Irene's life were in danger. The pelt of rain against the glass beat that thought into my brain: "Maybe it is! Maybe it is!"

By the time we skidded to a stop in the slush of Rydell Oaks driveway I was prepared to find Irene's poor, beaten body huddled somewhere in that gloomy prison. I don't remember that we even stopped to knock.

"Well, it's quiet enough," muttered Dr. Rascob, peering into the shadowy vault of the salon. Twilight had blanketed the house with a thick web of gloom. "I could be wrong in my guess."

My heart was pounding wildly. "We could carry her off—the two of us," I said.

"Don't be a fool!" he snapped. "Since we're alone, I think we might have another poke at that upstairs den, while we wait."

My knees sagged at the thought, but I followed the doctor's lead up the great flowing stairway. He pushed into the room without fear, and we took our places in two chairs as though we were acting out a scene which had been rehearsed before. I could not look at Garson's old desk for fear my brother's grotesque face might be there nodding at me.

For a brief, terrifying moment I felt adrift in a vast sea of space. I clutched at the doctor like a drowning man.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"I can't stand this room," I whispered.

For answer he struck a match over his watch, and then leaped to his feet, twisting my arm. "Good heavens! Why didn't I remember about the time? Quick!"

He dragged me out to the landing, and down the stairway. This all seemed to have happened before. We were acting out a dream—

At the first landing Dr. Rascob pressed me against the railing. I stared down at the figure of Irene Mauselle standing in the salon.

She was speaking to someone beyond our view! "I'm sorry that I have given this impression. There is nothing between us,

really. What have I done to make you think so?"

Whoever the party was, he spoke so softly that we heard not a breath.

"But I do not love you!" Irene protested. "There is another man, believe me."

Still that perplexing silence.

"No, not my husband," she sighed. "I don't know why I tell you this."

I could have leaped the banister, but for Dr. Rascob's fingers digging my arm.

Irene went on quickly. "I owe much to my husband. There is a debt between us, and that is all. Have you heard enough? Why do you stay here, haunting us? Why don't you leave?"

I saw her draw back, crouching as if to hide her half-clothed body from view. She threw out her hands in a gesture of fright. "No! Please do not! Don't kiss me! I couldn't bear it!"

I TRIED to cry out, but the voice was frozen in me. Slowly her attitude changed and the whole scene sickened me. At last she staggered backward, and at the same time I heard a voice directly below me. I looked down on the lean figure of Verni Mauselle.

"A very pretty scene," he hissed. "Too bad that I must put in the unhappy ending."

Irene's lips moved stiffly, but she could not speak.

"On the contrary, I understand perfectly," said Verni to that mysterious third person, and there seemed to be words groping in my memory that would reply to his.

"She is entirely to blame," Verni went on coldly. "She is not capable of a love like mine. Are you, Irene? Answer me! Could you kill for love? That is the final test. I can do that. To kill is the supreme passion. See!"

He drew a long, queer-shaped pistol from beneath his dressing-gown. He bit off his speech without emotion like an executioner: "Why don't you speak, my dear? I'll treasure the words."

Irene flung her arms over her face and moaned, "Oh, dear God! You are wrong, Verni. This man is nothing to me!"

"The more shame to you!" sneered Verni. "I've had enough of your affairs. I mean nothing to you. I've known that always, but now you must flaunt these lovers in my face! First that Avery Rydell and now this one!"

She seemed to snatch at my name: "Avery Rydell!"

I saw the gun barrel drift to a bead on the white V of her breast. Irene's words were springboards to my feet, and a single twist of my hand launched me clear of the banister. While my body kicked into a dive I could hear the sharp cough of the gun, and then my shoulder struck with stunning impact. There was a dreadful crack of bone beneath me and my body sprawled over the buckled form of Verni Mauselle.

The pain grinding out of my shoulder was a kind of paralysis. Numbly, I raised myself and the head of the man squatting under me toppled back horribly on a broken neck, the hair falling loosely, and the eyes bursting outward.

Vaguely I saw Dr. Rascob bending over Irene's limp form, and I crawled toward them. With glazed vision I could still see the heave of her breast. Where there should have been two red holes there was only soft white flesh.

"Thank heaven!" I heard the doctor breathe. "He only fired twice!"

On my knees I fumbled at her, played with the warmness of her cheeks, and the doctor turned to Verni.

"Her husband is dead," he announced coolly. "We must move him before she regains consciousness."

"Out of here!" I cried, with a painful gurgle in my throat. "We must get her out of this house!"

"Yes," said Dr. Rascob, and he lifted her with an effort.

I staggered wearily to my feet, and swam through a nausea of pain. Dragging through the outer corridor, I saw and registered the blinking light of five burning candles. In a last gesture of fear and hate I swept up the candelabrum with my free hand and hurled it back at the ugly black maw of the house. The five flames streaked through darkness, struck a curtain, and scattered like frightened birds.

The car was already in the outer drive when I had slumped against the cushion and looped my good arm around Irene Mauselle's sagging waist.

At the outer bend Dr. Rascob glanced back, and skidded to a halt. "What have you done, Avery?" he gasped.

I looked dully at Rydell House. Flames, like little red gnomes, were bobbing at the windows and dancing across the roof. A monster fist of black smoke coiled around the house, slowly crushing out its miserable life.

I shrugged my crushed shoulder, and groaned at the pain. "A fitting funeral pyre for Verni Mauselle," I muttered. "Jealousy had burned the life out of him, anyway."

"You're a crazy fool, Avery!" said the doctor, and added quite calmly, "get down and let me look at that shoulder."

BY THE time my broken shoulder was bound and Irene had come alive enough to be told, the house was a smoldering crust, exactly as I had glimpsed it years before from this same bend in the road. The three of us sat on the ground. Irene's trembling body was warm, clinging against me.

"We can tell the sheriff that the house caught fire in the struggle," said Dr. Rascob, drawing from his pocket the gun that I had last seen in Verni's hand. "It will not be hard to explain that a man like Verni Mauselle was trying to kill his wife."

"How could he possibly have missed her?" I said.

The doctor studied my face. "Don't you remember, Avery? He didn't miss. There was another man who jumped between them and saved her life."

My reason fought against the idea. "How can it be?" I said.

"I don't know how it can be. I only know what you have told me of that house. A man has fired two shots across ten years of time."

"You mean it was Randall Bauder, there in that room with Irene?" I gasped. "Randall Bauder jumped between them and saved her life?"

"It must have been!" he declared. "This woman was the vision that Randall told us about. He was able to talk to her and to touch her across the years. Your brother Garson told you that he had built time into his house as you might build an ordinary wall. That salon must have been a kind of miniature infinity; ten years of time was only a thin curtain that could be pierced by a voice—or a bullet!"

I shook my fist defiantly at the house and its ugly secret.

"This afternoon I guessed the truth," said the doctor. "There was no saving Randall Bauder, who was already out of our reach, but I was afraid Mauselle might fire a third shot and kill his wife."

At the last I was the skeptical one. 'It seems like an impossible dream!"

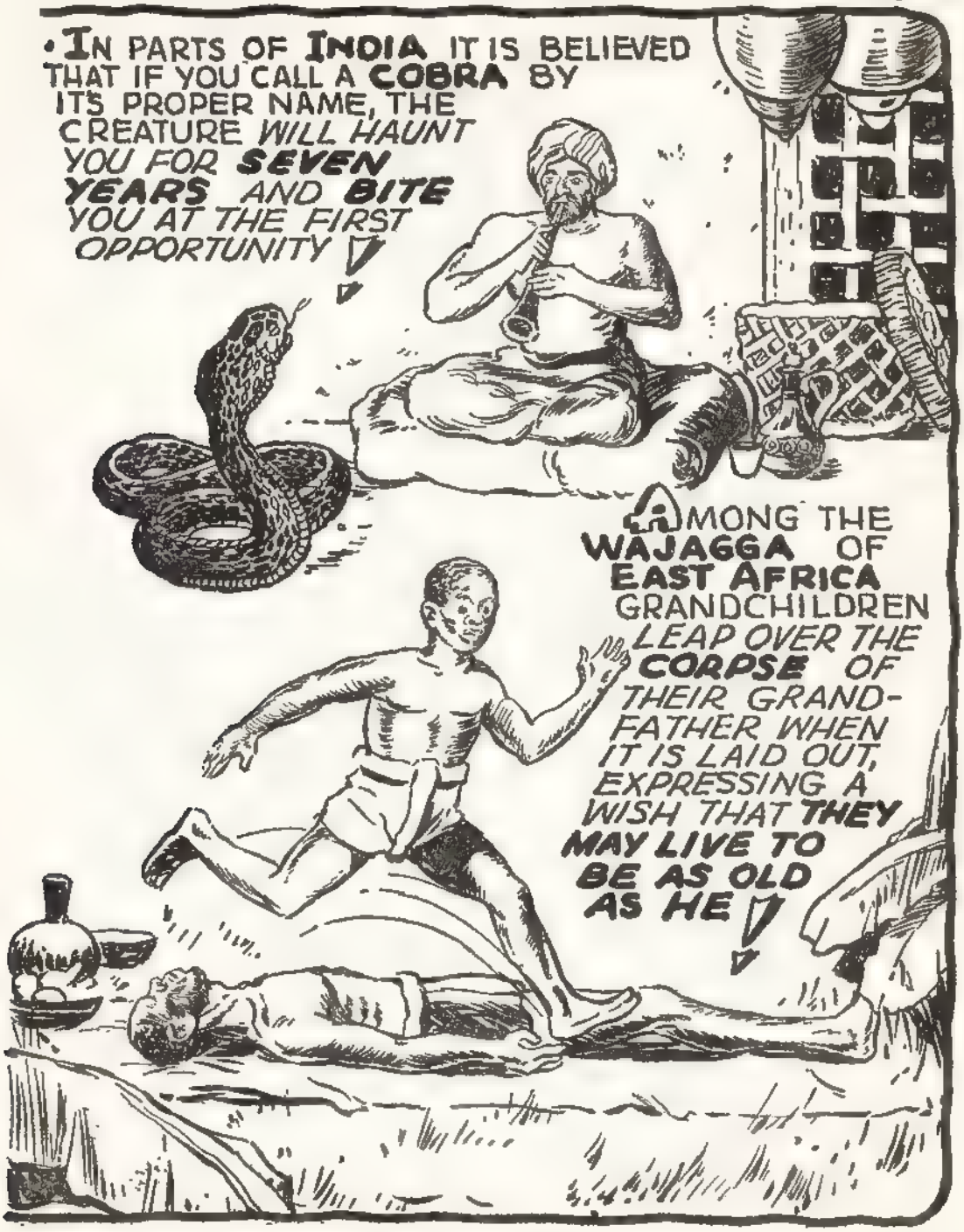
"Shall we always think of it that way?" suggested the doctor. He carefully wrapped the gun in a handkerchief and replaced it in his pocket. "I believe the sheriff already has seen the wounds that are made by such a gun as this. Sheriff Stone is a practical man. He will never understand everything which you and I have seen, but he will be glad to know that Verni Mauselle, a jealous husband, was the murderer of Randall Bauder!"

SUPERSTITIONS

THE **BATAKS** OF **SUMATRA** BELIEVE THAT THE SOULS OF THE DEAD *ARE MAN'S CHIEF ENEMIES* AND WHEN BAD TIMES ARE ENCOUNTERED IT IS ASSUMED THAT THE SPIRITS ARE DISCONTENTED WITH THE CEREMONIES ACCORDED THEM! BECAUSE OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SUPPLYING ALL THE ATTENTION DEMANDED BY THESE SPIRITS, AND WHEN TOO MANY TROUBLES ARE INFLICTED UPON THE LIVING, THE BATAKS RESORT TO THEIR TRADITIONAL BELIEF THAT THEIR EARLY HOME WAS IN SOME OTHER LAND, AND THAT THE SPIRITS OF THEIR DEAD RELATIVES MAY WISH TO GO THERE. GRAVEDIGGERS ARE THEREFORE EMPLOYED, AND THE BONES OF THE MOST RECENT AND MORE ANNOYING ANCESTORS ARE **DUG UP**, AND *A CHIP FROM EACH SKULL IS PUT INTO A* ***MINIATURE BOAT.*** THE TRIBE ASSEMBLES BESIDE THE NEAREST RIVER AND THE BOAT IS LAUNCHED. VOICES WAIL BUT HEARTS SECRETLY REJOICE AS THE SHIP SAILS AWAY WITH ITS GHOSTLY PASSENGERS BOUND FOR THEIR ANCESTRAL HOME *WHERE THE OLD ONES ARE EXPECTED TO BE HAPPY AND* ***TROUBLE THE LIVING NO MORE!***

AND TABOOS

by Mell



The Victory of the Vita-Ray

By ***STANTON A. COBLENTZ***

Out of the past, out of their graves, come the ruthless men of all ages . . . summoned to fight again.

I

CARL VON STORG, the world-famous inventor, made a deep bow, and smiled fawningly.

"Yes, Your Excellency, it does seem strange—impossible. But I will stake my head upon it. If this miracle does not come about—"

"If it does not come about, your head will be the forfeit!" growled Dictator Mallitot, bringing his bullish jaws together with an ominous snap. "By my sword! If it was anybody with less reputation—"

"My reputation, Excellency, is nothing to what it will be when this wonder is accomplished."

Mallitot tapped thoughtfully against the golden plush of his great throne-like chair of state. His little black eyes narrowed with such fierce intensity that it was easy to see why he had been secretly nicknamed

"The Frenzy." After a moment, he declared:

"It is my rule, von Storg, never to miss the chance to investigate anything new. If I can find a secret weapon that will give us the edge over our enemies, then I will move heaven and earth to get hold of it. But this so-called Vita-Ray of yours sounds —well, too preposterous! What did you say? You could bring back Caesar, Jenghis Khan and Napoleon?"

"Exactly, Your Excellency! Along with Washington, Grant, Lee, Charlemagne, or any other great commander. It is all very simple, once you have mastered the mechanics of time-space."

And you have accomplished that?"

The sneer in Mallitot's manner indicated his disbelief; his attitude was that of a cat who wishes to play with a mouse before completing the kill.

"Just so, Your Excellency. I will not take up time explaining the mathematics of the process, which only three persons on earth beside myself understand. The essence of it, though, is that I have built a super-dimensional mould, which can take impressions from the fourth and fifth dimensions. In these spheres time exists *in space;* so that if one catches an image of any part of space, one will also catch a segment of time, which may be the remote past or future. I have, moreover, perfected a gauge which can pick out the exact segment of the past or future—"

Mallitot was shifting uneasily in his seat. For a moment he was about to motion to the iron-helmeted guards who stood, rigid as planks, beside the bronze door to his right. Instead, however, he interrupted von Storg bruskly:

"You say you take impressions from other dimensions. How does that enable you to bring us a living man—"

The inventor smiled. "That is simple, Your Excellency. Let me offer an illustration. You listen to a phonograph; you think you hear the voice of a man long dead. Actually, of course, you do not hear his voice at all. You hear a *reproduction* of his voice, preserved by the markings on the records. In the same way, the time-space mould will not actually bring you the past. But it will bring you impressions from the past, which, given the proper apparatus, can be enlarged into exact duplicates of bygone beings—of men and women dead a thousand, two thousand years."

"And you have the proper apparatus?"

"I have been working on it for twenty years, Your Excellency, and have just now perfected it. Merely as an experiment, I have this very day brought back Homer and Socrates. If you wish to see them—"

Mallitot's right hand shot out impatiently; his heavy brows drew together in a disgusted grimace. "Haven't time!" he grumbled.

"Hereafter, of course, I will concentrate on generals. Have you any preferences, Your Excellency?"

"When you have brought back Tamerlane, Wellington, and Frederick the Great, you may call for me!" snapped Mallitot. "I give you ten days! Otherwise, have a thought for that head of yours!"

II

IN von Storg's private mansion, ten days later, all was confusion. Footmen and butlers bustled about the fifty-room former castle, which von Storg had purchased from the proceeds of innumerable inventions. From mouth to mouth the excited word was whispered, "Mallitot is coming today! Mallitot is coming!" and whoever heard these tidings trembled, for the dictator was best beloved at a distance. But other rumors, even more extraordinary, were bruited about in the servants' quarters: "The master has twenty lunatics as his guests! He has them all penned up on

the top floor, carefully guarded. They are in truth wild men—— They wear swords and armor. They go clanking about, rattling their spurs. They gnash their teeth, and mutter oaths. The looks in their eyes would make a tiger turn pale.

Meanwhile von Storg, busy in his laboratory in the basement, was occupied with a great machine that seemed mostly a mass of large mirrors and prisms, connected with an intricacy of wires, and varied with dozens of foot-long bulbs that looked like magnified radio tubes. But the central part of the apparatus was a ceiling-high globe of frosted glass, in which from time to time a mass of plastic material was placed, and which would open every few hours, to eject a reeling, human-shaped thing, stunned and bewildered, and dressed in the costume of some long-past age.

At length came the announcement that Mallitot had indeed arrived, along with his retinue! By previous arrangement, the inventor met him in a small ante-room, where they coud talk without fear of being overheard. The dictator, blunt as always, greeted him with the inquiry, "Well, von Storg, have you done it?"

"Yes, Your Excellency—on the whole. There have been some minor exceptions. I have been unable to locate the Duke of Marlborough, Cromwell, or Alaric the Visigoth. Somehow, they have gotten lost in inaccessible crannies of time-space. Likewise, Timur the Great—"

"That is unfortunate!" sighed Mallitot. "I have always admired his genius for throwing up mounds of skulls. Well, then, who have you located?"

"If you will wait just a minute, Your Excellency, you shall see. To avoid confusion, I shall bring them in one by one."

He pressed a button; and called through a speaking tube, "Send me down Number 13. At once!"

Hardly more than sixty seconds had gone by before the door rattled open. An imperious figure entered with a stately stride, over five feet in height. Across his shoulders a time-worn military cape was thrown; he wore the frayed and dusty headdress of an officer of the early nineteenth century; his face, sharp-cut and haughty, and his flashing falcon eyes, could belong to only one character in all history.

Spontaneously, Mallitot arose and bowed. For the first time in his life he was awed by a human presence; unconsciously his manner became deferential.

"Where am I, Messieurs? What is the meaning of this indignity?" rumbled the stranger, in a rusty-sounding but recognizable French.

For a moment, as he stared at this replica of the victor of Austerlitz and Jena, Mallitot was without words.

"It is all so strange, I do not understand what has happened. I do not understand," mumbled the Emperor, rubbing his brow in confusion. "It was all darkness. All darkness—darkness. Then I awoke. I seem to have had nightmares—about some island in the sea, where I was a prisoner. Dieu! It is good to awaken from nightmares. But where am I? Where is Josephine?"

"She is dead more than a hundred years, Sire," replied von Storg. "Have you forgotten? She died even before you did."

The great commander shook his head confusedly. "Died—died—yes, she died. Josephine died. So then I too am dead? That would explain it. This—this is the land of ghosts?"

"Not so, Sire. We have brought you back to earth, after more than a century. Do you not wish to live, and fight again?"

The renowned general's hand reached down toward the rusted sword at his side. "On my faith, I do! The English—those hard-headed dolts of English—I must still conquer the English!"

"Exactly, Sire! But first we must make things a little clearer for you."

FOR the next twenty minutes Mallitot and von Storg took turns in explaining just what had happened, answering their guest's questions, and trying to overcome his bewilderment.

"I must tell you, Sire, why we are so eager to have you with us," the dictator at last stated. "I, too, am an emperor—the leader of a great coalition of nations in the vastest war of history. Three-fourths of Europe and part of Asia are fighting all the rest of the world. Of late the battle has not gone well. We need new leaders. And who could lend our army more prestige than the great Napoleon? Who could strike more terror into enemy hearts? Who could bring us faster to victory?"

An eager, a savage glitter had come into the eyes of the revived one. "At your service, Messieurs! But first tell me about this war of yours. Is it fought most with infantry—or cavalry?"

Mallitot and von Storg did their best to explain the transformation in warfare. "It will take you months of study, Sire, to catch up with our methods. By present-day standards, your means of killing and destroying were childish. Before giving you command of an army, we must set up a school where you may study, along with your great kindred of all the ages."

Attended by two armed guards, Napoleon was led away to be followed by the old Assyrian warrior-king Assur-bani-apal, who in turn was succeeded by Kublai Khan and Attila the Hun. In all these cases, it was difficult to establish communication, even through interpreters; but it was evident that, by means of sedulous instruction, all these famed leaders could be taught a modern language within a few months; while their natural military genius would swiftly master modern technique.

Grandiose in the extreme were the plans that Mallitot began to form, after he had interviewed ten of the resurrected generals. "I will make you Minister of War, von Storg, as a reward!" he exclaimed, while enthusiastically striding back and forth, amid a clanking of spurs. "It may take a year to accomplish, but we will produce the sensation of all time. I will appoint Napoleon commander-in-chief—second, of course, only to yourself. As a marshal of the army of the west, I will select Julius Caesar. For the north, Philip of Macedon! His son Alexander will have charge of the army of the south. In the east, Hannibal's father Hamilcar Berca, along with Hannibal himself—"

In this vein Mallitot rushed on and on. "With the best military brains of history behind us, we will conquer the world!" he swore; while von Storg, with a vaguely ironic smile, nodded agreement.

Meantime, in closely guarded rooms upstairs, a score of bristling sworded figures, fierce-eyed and proud of bearing, and clad in all manner of antique uniforms, shields and armor, stalked uneasily back and forth, muttering unintelligibly in many languages and glaring at one another with haughty, hostile glances.

III

A YEAR had gone by. The War of Five Continents, as Mallitot's Herculean struggle was called, was blazing as fiercely as ever, with the issue still in the balance. And as yet the public had no inkling of the great surprise that lay just ahead.

Meanwhile, Mallitot and his new Minister of War, Carl von Storg, held many an excited conference. "Your Excellency, I have had a hard time talking Hannibal out of the idea of using elephants," he would report. Or, "Alexander is a devil to deal with, Your Excellency. He goes around swinging his sword, and shouting, 'More worlds to conquer! More worlds to conquer!,' until I wonder if he isn't suffer-

ing from a psychosis. And Caesar, Your Excellency, is haunted by a phobia. He can't get it out of his head that someone wants to assassinate him. Why, he turns pale at the very sight of a dagger."

Nevertheless, Mallitot's plans progressed admirably on the whole; until that happy day when Napoleon and the others were skilled enough in modern methods to be entrusted with army commands. The scheme had been thoroughly worked out: a concentrated assault on all fronts on a given day, when the great strategists of all time would overwhelm the enemy in the most frightening blitzkrieg in history. It was Napoleon himself who had plotted the campaign, down to the last bombing attack on undefended villages, and the last Fifth Column planting of bewilderment and terror among the civil population.

There was just one problem that seemed to worry the new Minister of War. "It looks, Your Excellency," he gloomily confessed one day, "as if there is a minor defect in the Vita-Ray. After all, you know, it is difficult to get even a photograph without some distortion. One small ingredient, somehow, has been left out of our generals."

"What is that?" demanded Mallitot, snapping his heavy jaws angrily together.

"Well, Your Excellency, it may be because it's so fragile an element. They all seem to have lost their moral sense."

The dictator's thick features relaxed in open laughter. "Pooh!" he derided. "What use is a moral sense in the new warfare?"

Nevertheless, the time was to come when he was profoundly to regret this lack.

It was planned that, on the day of the blitzkrieg, Napoleon himself would lead the central drive against the chief enemy, Anglia. Simultaneously, Caesar and Alexander would strike in powerful flanking attacks; while Jenghis Khan and Charlemagne, aided by lesser leaders such as Scipio, Pyrrhus and Rameses of Egypt, would hurl themselves upon Anglia's allies in irresistible assaults. Meanwhile, Hannibal, with such able aides as Charles XII of Sweden, Federick the Great and Chaka the Zulu, would conduct a pincers movement that would catch the foe between the claws of a gigantic vise. In less than ten days, according to Mallitot's exultant calculations, the war would be over.

IV

ON THE day of the intended assault, the Dictator abandoned his usual habit of breakfasting in bed. In fact, he was up before dawn; and, decked in clanking military apparel, anxiously ranged the Red Room of his palace, awaiting tidings from the field of battle.

His first intimation that not all was well came to him at just about daybreak, when he failed to receive the expected telegram, informing him of the successful surprise assault upon the Anglian central headquarters. Impatiently he continued to stalk back and forth in his palace room; and his irritation was inflamed by the fact that all attempts to reach Napoleon by telephone had been without result. "What in damnation's the matter with the fellow!" he raged. "Doesn't he know he's subject to my commands?"

"Perhaps, Your Excellency, his headquarters have been bombed," suggested Paul Dockwitter, the Assistant Minister of War, who sat at a far corner of the room, sorting dispatches.

It was then that the dictator's private telephone rang out clangorously. Von Storg was at the other end of the line; and his tones, jerky with excitement, had no regard for the usual courtesies. "Quick, sir! I must come to you! At once! Haven't a second to waste!"

Taking consent for granted, the speaker snapped off; while Mallitot, resuming his

floor pacing, cursed his Minister of War with a variety and savagery of expletives that would have turned a longshoreman green with envy.

Not five minutes had passed before von Storg had burst in. He had the appearance of a man who had not slept all night; his hair was in disorder, his eyes bloodshot, his tie half loose, his face red, his clothes rumpled, and his manner that of one who has just escaped from a fire.

"Your Excellency — Excellency!" he gasped, as he stormed into the room. "I— I wanted to tell you in person. Something —something terrible has happened!"

Mallitot's huge clenched fists swung high in air, and came down as if to pound the defenseless Minister of War.

"What is it?" he boomed.

"Excellency, I assure you it is something unforeseen—quite unforeseen," rushed on von Storg. "There was nothing we could do to guard against it—nothing under heaven! No one is to blame. As I told you, our generals lack all moral sense—"

"Thunder and brimstone!" snarled Mallitot, resorting to his favorite oath. And he took a step forward, and prepared to seize von Storg by the neck. "Are you ever coming to the point? Or will I have to shake it out of you?"

"No, no, Your Excellency—be calm. The fact is—the fact is simply this. There has been a revolt."

"Revolt?" Mallitot's tones were like a lion's. "Who dares revolt against me?"

"No one, Your Excellency. No one. They have revolted against Napoleon."

"How in hell can that be?"

Von Storg stared his chief steadily in the eye, then continued, "It is God's truth, Your Excellency. Caesar and Alexander hatched the plot together. They were jealous of Napoleon. Resented your putting the High Command in the hands of an upstart, as they called him—a man two thousand years their junior. At this very minute, Alexander and Caesar are closing in on Napoleon. Your armies of the west and south have launched a blitzkrieg against the armies of the east and north."

Mallitot reeled; then steadied himself.

"But what of Anglia?" he groaned. "Are they not fighting Anglia and her allies?"

"No, Your Excellency. As I have pointed out, your new generals have no moral sense."

FURTHER details of the attack were soon revealed. Alexander had set out at the head of a squadron of dive bombers, while Caesar had followed with a charge of heavy tanks. Hannibal, still vowing eternal vengeance against Rome, had promptly taken sides against Caesar, and was doing his best to save Napoleon's lines from being breached. But two Panzer divisions, ably led by Pompey the Great, had driven a spearhead ten miles into the Napoleonic ranks; and the resistance of Vercingetorix, the crafty Gallic chieftain, had not yet sufficed to stem the tide. Moreover, mechanized reinforcements, under the command of King Alfred—

But Mallitot could not bear to hear more of the story.

"Stop!" he cut von Storg short, with an angry pounding of his fists. "I'll have those traitors Caesar and Alexander executed! I will go to the front in person—yes, in person—"

But the insistent clanging of the telephone interrupted him. It was von Storg who took up the receiver; and his face turned pale as he listened. "Heaven help us!" he ejaculated. "Heaven help us all!" And then, after an interval of listening, "What! Are you certain? Is that all confirmed?"

"Your Excellency," he announced, hesitantly, while his whole form trembled, "I have just received bad news. Hannibal—poor devil!—has been mowed down by

machine-gun fire. Richard Coeur de Lion is wounded by shrapnel. And Napoleon is a prisoner again."

"What is that?" roared Mallitot. "Napoleon a prisoner of Caesar?"

"No, Your Excellency. A prisoner of the Anglians. The damned foxes! They took advantage of the quarrel among our generals to start an offensive. Meanwhile, some fifth columnists have stabbed Caesar to death. Alexander is reported missing in an air attack. Attila the Hun, who led Napoleon's mechanized cavalry, was last seen in full flight. Peter the Great is feared gassed, along with Cortez and Pizarro. The battle, however, is still raging, with Darius of Persia trying to rally his forces against the Anglians—"

Before von Storg could finish a commotion from just outside broke in like a thunderstorm. A tumult of shouts and yells, mingled with clattering and crashing sounds and the booming and rumbling of explosives, burst over them in sudden fury. And, rushing to a window, they saw that which made their knees turn weak and their voices temporarily fail them.

A vast conclave was approaching, thousands strong. Helmeted men, with outthrust bayonets and grim faces, were pressing forward. Overhead the airplanes wheeled, offering protection to the advancing troops; ahead of them rumbled the tanks, amid spouts of smoke; while multicolored banners, lettered in many languages, waved challengingly above the men. In the vanguard, swinging a glittering sword, strode one whom von Storg instantly recognized.

"It's Leonidas!" he cried. "Leonidas, the Spartan!"

Mallitot's heart sank as he gazed at that redoubtable king of antiquity, the valiant Greek who had held the hordes of Xerxes against overwhelming odds.

Proudly through the air rang the battle cry of the approaching hosts. "Down with tyrants! Down with tyrants! A free world for free men! A free world for free men!"

On and on, without a pause or break, the assailants swept. Their uniforms, Mallitot saw, were the olive-green of Anglia. Their weapons were the weapons of Anglia. But they all did deference to Leonidas, who, taking advantage of the strife between Caesar and Napoleon, had offered his services to the enemy, and now, by a strategic march, had advanced toward the dictator's palace in an enveloping movement.

Instantly Mallitot perceived that all was lost. He was surprised, trapped beyond possibility of escape. His empire was in enemy hands! The war, for all practical purposes, was ended! No choice remained to him except to become a prisoner, or take his own life.

As he reached for the dagger that always lay concealed against his left side, he took time to shout angrily at von Storg:

"Pig! Imbecile! Traitor! Couldn't you foresee that these vile creations of yours would turn against me?"

"No, Your Excellency. Again there was some little kink in the time-space mould. How could I know that Leonidas, alone of all the generals, would come back with a moral sense?"

Triumphantly the cries of the approaching multitudes rang out, "Down with tyrants! Down with tyrants! A free world for free men!"

The arms of the beseigers were already hammering against the outer walls of the palace as the right hand of Mallitot, archdictator and war lord of more than half of Europe and Asia, came down with a desperate lunge, and the slim blade of the poignard buried itself in his heart.

A strange spell was cast by this mountain forest place. A spell that brought untoward dreams, music . . . and death.

The Golden Bough

By DAVID H. KELLER

"LAST night," she said, "I had a dream. In that dream I saw a house in a dark forest. Now that we are married let us travel till we find that house, for it is there that I want to live."

Paul Gallien smiled as he looked at his bride of a few hours. This was her first request, and long ago he had promised her that her first request after their marriage should be granted, no matter what it was. This idea of hunting a dream house seemed a peculiar one but he decided it would be fun—and besides he had promised.

Gallien was of royal blood, but it was in an age when royalty was no longer fashionable; so he contented himself with the

other things he had inherited and forgot about the title. He had been bequeathed money, pride which held his head high, courage and a kindly manner. He had married Constance Martin knowing little, and caring less, about her ancestry. All that concerned him was the plain fact that they were in love.

So Gallien and his bride started eastward through Europe, with no definite destination, simply sliding over the hills and down through the valleys in search of their dream house. For Constance often said to her husband:

"I shall not have any trouble in knowing the house when I see it. When we find it we shall rest there a long time till the remainder of my dream comes true. It is a house in a dark forest and it is as real as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I know you are laughing at me, but it is not a wild goose chase. We are seeking an actuality."

AS THEY slowly drove through the country or sat over their meals at little taverns or enjoyed the sunsets at the close of the day, they talked of the dream house and Gallien asked a thousand questions. Was it a house or a castle? How large was it? Was it habitable or just a mass of ruins? Were they really to live there? Was there a library? Fireplaces? Thus, through long conversations they discussed the most important details of their search.

Gallien did not care, so long as he could spend twenty-four joyous hours with Constance; he did not care if the journey never ended, if only she remained contented and happy. On and on, day after day, they went and finally came to a dark forest. There the giant pines rose a hundred feet upward before branching. There was a hush in the air and a peculiar absence of little living things, which made all still and unusually quiet. The ground was covered with a heavy matting of pine needles. In some of the little open spaces thick moss shone softly green against the copper background of the dry spills. Circles of moist ground were ringed round about by toadstools which glowed waxy-white in the dim, uncertain light; on high bare rock shelves fool's gold glittered in the occasional sunbeams.

From the lofty branches of the pines, cones had fallen on the road; these crackled loudly under the tires, but this and the throb of the engine were the only sounds that broke the eerie stillness. The road crossed over other roads, yet here and there, bunches of wild grass grew in the wagon ruts, showing how old the road was and how seldom used. Gallien throttled the engine down till the car made only a few miles an hour; they drifted rather than rolled; seeming to sail into a dreamland of ethereal beauty. At times an unexpected ray of sunshine illuminated a part of the forest, like light breaking through the multi-tinted windows of a Gothic cathedral, and for a moment the heart paused in its beating with the beauty of it all.

They came at last to a fork in the road. The main road went on down into the valley; the other climbed in tortuous curves, up the mountain. When the woman saw that up-winding road merging into the pines she whispered, as though anxious that no one, save her husband, should hear:

"Let us go that way. What a beautiful road! Where will it take us? What shall we find at its end?"

"I know," replied her husband, as he turned off the main road. "We shall go on and up and on and up, and at the end we shall come to the home of a woodcutter or a charcoal burner and, after much trouble, we will turn around and come down again."

"Let's do that!" she urged enthusiastically.

GALLIEN was not correct, however, in his prophecy, for at the end of the road was neither hut nor peasant burning charcoal. Rather, there was a house in the woods. Constance Martin Gallien looked at it once and looked at it twice; then covering her face with her hands started to cry. Her husband, who now was accustomed to her moods, gently drew her to him saying nothing until her sobbing ceased. At last she lifted her head from his shoulder and turned a smiling face to him, saying:

"How stupid! But it was joy, Paul, that made me cry and nothing else. Now we have come to the end of our search, for this is the house of my dreams—and in it I want to live a long time—till I know what life is and the real definition of love."

Gallien looked at her, surprised and slightly disappointed.

"I did not know your plan included really living here. I am sure it would be a splendid place to stay for a little while if we had servants and could entertain and had all the little accessories to make life comfortable and pleasant, but none of these things can be had here. Still, if you want to, we will stay here, if possible, for a few days. Perhaps after a day and a night of it you will be glad to go on with me to some city where there is light and laughter, music and dancing."

Constance jumped out of the car.

"At least we can see what it is like! I called it a house, but it is really an old castle. I am sure it must be very old. Do you remember anything about castles, Paul? Could you tell how old this place is just by looking at it?"

He looked at the rough stone-walled building; the weathered parapets, then shook his head.

"How can I tell? But there is a part of your answer. See that tree? The one growing near the wall? That was not there when the castle was built. It would have afforded too easy an access to the windows. No doubt when the place was built all the trees within a hundred yards were cut down so if an enemy attacked the castle they would have no shelter. This one tree, surely, and perhaps all the others, must have grown since that time. Some of them are five feet in diameter. This road must have been built by the Romans. Maybe part of this castle was built by them. Shall we go inside? No one lives here save bats and toads. However, we can look around and go on until we reach a town."

But again he was in error for, circling the wall, they came to an old woman, seated on a three-legged stool, herding a few goats and geese. Gallien spoke to her first in French and then in German, but she only smiled at him toothlessly. Constance tried Italian, and at once there followed a conversation that glittered in explicatives as a summer storm is forked with lightning. At the end of ten minutes the bride turned to her puzzled husband.

"You did not know I could do that?" she asked. "I was raised in a convent in Rome. This old dame says she is the caretaker of the castle. Years ago the owner went to war and simply told her to look after the place; that if anyone came who wanted to live here, to rent it for a certain sum in gold. She says there is everything in the place for comfort and she will serve us. Her people live in the valley and will bring us food. She prefers to live here with her pets."

The aged woman took the bride's hand and whispered. Tears brimmed Constance's eyes as she translated:

"She says the man who went to war years ago was her lover. They were happy here for a month and a day. Since he has gone she just stayed here, with her memories for companions."

The dame showed them through the castle. They were surprised to find it so

comfortable in its homely simplicity. Throughout there were signs of great age; but all had been well and lovingly cared for. A slight chill was over all, but it was not dampness; the walls were dry. The woman asked if they wished her to build fires. Constance looked pleadingly at Paul. Half reluctantly he handed the woman five pieces of gold, the price of a month's service. Thus it was that they came to live in the dream house, now materialized as a castle in the Dark Forest.

Many were the rooms in the castle which the lovers thrilled over, but two delighted them especially, each in a different way. One was a library, with solid walls and a long, horizontal slit of a window through which the sun came from morning to night, and time could be told by the position of the beam of light. The first streaming light of morning fell on Eve, graven in pink marble, conscious of the knowledge gained by the fall in the Garden. Just before night came the last light which fell on a bronze man, tortured by the surety that he must die before he achieved to the wisdom greater age might have taught him. Between the marble Eve and the bronze man were books of every size, cover and age. Paul Gallien knew that he would be very happy in this room.

The other room was a bedroom. The floor was of wide, oaken boards covered here and there with bear skins. A bridal chest was the only furniture, save a large four-poster bed standing central in the room, and was, according to the ancient guide, the best bed in the castle. Her eyes glistened as she looked at it—glistened through tears. Many narrow windows completed one side of the room; casement windows, which could be opened, giving the night full freedom to enter. Decorations there were none; no pictures nor draperies; simply the chest and the bed.

Constance, beholding the bedroom, quivered with delight.

"This will be our room," she said and requested that the bed be aired forthwith and made with fresh clean sheetings. Thus, one was happy because of the library and the other because of the bedroom and each pleasured in the joy of the other.

FOR a week they did nothing but explore the castle and the dark woods surrounding it. During that week the automobile stood where they had left it.

The road ran past the castle and on through the woods to a sudden ending at a sharp precipice, making an edge to the mountain. A mile below they could see a little mountain stream decorating the mottled green of the valley like a silver ribbon, lying haphazard. Standing on the very rim of the world one day the lovers felt that here was truly the end of a long trail. Constance turned to her husband saying:

"Will you do one more favor for me?"

"If it will make you happy," he replied with a kiss.

She looked at him anxiously, twisting in her indecision.

"All my life, dear, I have wanted to be happy in just this way. I do not understand my emotions—but I do know that I am happy and that I am fearful lest something spoil it all. I want to stay here. At night I wake up crying, and I know the tears come because I cannot bear to think of leaving. Ever since I dreamed of this place I have wanted it, and in it I have found, not quiet peace, but a tumultuous rapture—expectation of what I know not nor why.

"This I do know; that if I have to leave here I shall die with longing to return. I can't bear to look at the car; it is a symbol of roving; it means that some day you will ask me to sit on the seat beside you and ride to the cities you delight in. When I see it standing there a dark despair fills my heart."

"Suppose I take it down to the village and store it?"

"No! Because then you can claim it again. I want— Oh! I know it is silly, but I want—I must have you do it! Start it and let it go down over the side—here. When I know that it is down there, crushed and broken, a mile below me, I shall sleep in peace—the fears of the great cities will no longer torture me with the menace of their nearness!"

Gallien drew a deep breath. "'Tis a good car," he said simply.

For answer she clung to him, trembling in the fierceness of her desire. And, because he loved her, he asked her to wait for him. Without looking at her again he went and drove the car within ten feet of the lip of the ledge. Stepping out, he threw on the gas and let it go free. Up it plunged into the air and down it fell—like a fallen star, striking so far below that no noise came to tell them of its destruction.

The man looked at the woman, and on his face was a twisted, bitter smile, but the woman, with eyes shut, breathed deeply, peacefully. Nor did she rouse from her seeming sleep for a long time and then only to kiss him passionately, lapsing again into her dreams. Thus it was dark before they returned to the castle.

The old woman was anxious about them, for seeing the car gone when she returned from her herding, she thought they had left for further adventuring; a new life, perhaps, in the great, to her unknown, cities, where her lover had gone whistling in the days before the war.

Thus the springtime came and went, and summer brooded warmly over the dark forest, in all its sweet majestic beauty. Time passed happily, though slowly, through long months. More and more time Gallien spent in the library, while Constance, in a long, happy daze, spent hours on the bed dreaming of the future and of dreams already come true. The dame had shown her dresses of ladies long dead, and more and more frequently the bride wore these gay things of past ages, and more and more she wore her hair braided down her back in two long ropes, falling below her knees; and more and more she passed the minutes looking through the windows into the dark forest.

One day she noticed that the room was but twenty feet from the ground and that the ivy covering the wall formed a perfect ladder for adventurous feet. That night she could not sleep. The old woman in her walled-off bedroom slept, dreaming of her long dead lover and the beautiful wild thing in the forest that had come to her through him. Gallien, tired from a day of study, slept dreamlessly. Under the flagstones in the kitchen the cricket slept, but Constance Martin Gallien, wide-eyed and pulsing-hearted, lay with her face in the moonbeams. Sleep she could not. In the dark forest there was neither song of bird, hoot of moon owl nor howl of far-away wolf. There all slept.

THEN came the near music of a pipe, the thin-trilling, few-noted music of a pipe, and Constance, without knowing that she knew it, realized that the tune was the oldest in the world contained in one octave, but encompassing every dread and exultation known to mankind throughout the ages. Even in bed her fair body wove from side to side as she lay listening to the music of the pipe. Not being able to bide longer she ran to the casement where she saw a man making the music, and around him in silent circles, were geese and goats. The man sat on a rock and made mad music in the moonlight.

The woman put on a pair of slippers, crept into a black silken robe, and inching to the window climbed down the ivy. Her feet hardly touched the ground as she sped to the rock, broke through the circle of

goats and geese and came near to the man who was making the olden music. As he came to the end of his song, and the music died in the murmuring notes, mixed with the mellow moonbeams, he looked at her with a glad smile.

"You like my music?"

"It's wonderful! Who are you and where did you learn to play?"

"I have always lived around here; this is my home. I never learned to play. I always knew how. Only one piece, but it can be played in an infinity of ways. Would you like to hear more? Come here, beside me, while I pipe for you."

Then he played in a livelier manner, and the goats and the geese stepped a gay measure to the music. Round and round the rock they went till at last Constance joined them. Between a goat and a goose she danced till there was an ending to the music. She rejoined the man on the rock, flushed and breathless, happier than she had been in all her life.

"Oh! I am so happy!" she whispered, entranced.

Throwing back his head he laughed, revealing glistening white teeth in the moonlight.

He tossed his arms upward. In one hand was the pipe, in the other there was nothing, and with that hand he clutched at moonbeams. Again he laughed gaily.

" 'Tis wonderful to be happy. Men and women used to be happy. I seem to remember this place being filled of a night with bravely dressed men and dainty women in love, and sometimes the men piped for the ladies to dance, sometimes the men loved for the entrancing of their women, and which pleased the women the more, the music or the loving, how can I, being a man, tell? Those days are gone save in my memory, and I am not sure even that serves me honestly. At least, I now have no audience save such as you see."

Suddenly she turned to him and asked: "Who *are* you?"

"What does that matter so long as my music thrills you?"

"It does make me glad. Weeks ago I dreamed of this place and asked my husband to find it with me. He did. I asked him to destroy the car so we would not be able to leave. He did. I want a son—a gay, gladsome son—who will be able to catch the moonbeams and play the pipes. Can he give me that son?"

"Perhaps, but what odds? If you want a son, I will tell you how. Have you seen the pool of dark water over the hill on the other side of the castle? No doubt the old lady told you not to drink there—that it was poison. Near the water is a giant oak. Now you must do thus and so—"

Slowly, for an hour he held her hand, telling her just how she should do and why and if she did this and the other as he directed, the desire of her heart would be granted. He promised that on every moonlit night he would sit on the rock, playing the pipe for her pleasurance and thus, when her child was born, it would be a child of great joy and wondrous beauty; a player of ancient tunes upon the pipes; a gatherer of moonbeams and star dust.

She walked slowly back to the castle, climbed the ivy, put off her shoes and her black silken robes, she stole again to her husband's side, while he, never having wakened, snored peacefully, for that he had never knowingly wronged anyone. Constance, awake beside him, heard him snore and still in her soul rang the unearthly sweet music of the stranger's pipe, she could not help contrasting the two Placing one ear against the pillow she covered the other with a mass of hair and a pink palm. Thus she slept, lulled to calm by the memory of that soul-engulfing liquid music of the moonlight. The next morning she woke and could not tell whether it had been a dream or a reality.

Her husband was still asleep but she woke him with a torrent of kisses and then was unable to tell him of the night or her desires.

THE same day the old woman left the castle and wandered through the dark forest till she met the man who had played the pipes. She kissed him tenderly and ran her fingers through his tight-curled hair and over his pointed ears. At last she took courage and asked him to play no more at the castle till the woman and the man departed.

"But you were asleep last night," he answered her.

"Yes, but I saw the tracks around the rock and the woman's footprints, mingled with those of the animals and the birds; so leave her alone, for the sake of your mother."

For reply he only laughed and ran away in big skipping leaps.

The mother was worried. She had never been able to tell whether she had created a simpleton or a God.

Constance began to prepare according to directions of the man who piped in the moonlight. There had to be a ladder, a sickle and a white sheet. Some of those things could only be got by the wiles of a cunning woman. Finally all was ready. With burning heart she undressed and pretended to sleep on her pillow. But while sleep came swiftly to her husband she remained wide-eyed and anxious till she was sure of his slumber. She donned her robe and slippers. Tying the sickle in the sheet and the bundle to her back, she went out the window to the ivy and down to where the ladder rested against the wall. Lifting the ladder to her shoulder she tiptoed westward from the castle to the place of the pool of dark water.

It was moonlight and the shadows and the moonbeams made curious fairyland of the dark forest. Though her heart was beating fast—fast—there was a song on her lips, a very old song, such as could have been sung within one octave or upon a very simple pipe. She came at last to the old oak tree which grew by the dark pool and drank of its water.

Placing the ladder against the scabby bole she looked upward. On the first branch, just a little above the ladder, grew a spray of mistletoe, its green leaves, white berries and gray stems all shimmering in the eerie moonlight. Taking the sheet she spread it evenly over the ground under the parasite plant; on the sheet she placed the sickle. Now she loosened the two long braids and let those dark, wonderous tresses come in freedom, one in front and one behind her body, which she freed from her silken robe and white gown. Taking the sickle in hand, she, trembling, started up the ladder.

Near the top she paused. The mistletoe was within her reach. She still hesitated, and while she did so—was it the wind?—a long strand of hair reached over and entwined around the gray branched parasite. The woman looked at the union of plant and hair, then slowly reached and freed herself. With the curved knife she began cutting the plant from the oak, being careful to take a large piece of the bark with the roots of the plant in it. With the last slash the mistletoe fell earthward, but on the shadowed sheet, which was as it should be, for all in vain had it touched the heart. Then this last of the Druid worshippers descended the ladder carefully and placed wet moss over the cut bark, tying it tenderly in the white linen sheet. The ladder she slid into the dark pool and did up her hair and put on her clothes. With ineffable joy in her heart, she tripped back to the castle. Somewhere in the dark, moon-spangled forest a laughing man piped a very old tune, and she, hearing him, sang the song to his music.

Back in the bedroom she found it still

light from the moon. On the headpost of the bed, on the side on which she slept, she fastened the freshly cut bark placing the wet moss over and around it, and wrapped it all with the white sheet which she tied in hard knots. Thus was the mistletoe grafted onto the oaken bed, just a foot above her pillow. She kissed the white fruit, and loosening her hair fell asleep.

Thus Paul Gallien first beheld her in the morning; on her face the smile of infinite peace. Her slippers, kicked wantonly from her feet, he found were wet, and her silken robe stained with dew.

"She is a queer little wild thing, and so far I cannot tell what she is doing. Perhaps the old woman can help me," he spoke to himself as a feeling of frustration and futility settled over him as a raincloud envelopes a mountain peak.

The next time one of the girls came up from the village with fruit, Gallien took her and the old woman into the kitchen where by the girl's little knowledge of French made the woman understand what he needed to know. Sighing, she bade the girl leave them. She then led Gallien to the library where she found him a very old book with pictures in it, and, crossing herself, left him. Gallien began the study of that book, even as young men have studied it in all centuries past.

The young bride woke, saw the mistletoe, smiled and went to sleep again. When next she woke, she dressed. After dinner she took the silver pitcher and in it carried water from the dark pool, as was her wont each day, for the moss must be moist for the grafted parasite to grow. And it grew. Finally it spread all over the head of the bed, fastening here and there to the ancient oak, and seeming to sap the life from it.

At last Paul Gallien solved the secret of the book and understood the conduct of his wife. Now while in the library he slept so when night came he was able to stay awake. The full moon passed, the dark of the moon had come and gone; now the crescent moon was growing larger, thriving on her diet of stars.

The first night of the watch Constance slept as though drugged. So satisfied was her husband with her sound sleep that he arose, lit a candle, and sat on the bridal chest, watching her. It was dark in the room and he decided that when she stirred he would blow out the candle, even though by so doing he would be alone with the shadowless things.

Her girlhood beauty was now ripening into the full bloom of womanhood; her white face shone like a pearl amid the blackness of her loosened hair which covered the pillow. Above her shadowed masses of the gray mistletoe, green leaves and white berries. Even as he looked a branch drooped slowly, until it rested on her breast. The ringlets of her hair seemed to curl upward from the pillow to interlace, caressingly, with the green leaves. All her fair body was at last covered with black hair and green plant. She smiled as though her dream were giving her great joy. Now and then her lips moved—as if caressing a lover.

The next nights were the same. Then came a fuller moonlight and the woman was restless. She tossed by her husband with little murmuring cries.

"I cannot sleep," she sobbed. "Life is too full. There is so much love and happiness in the world, why should a woman spend her life sleeping?" She flung herself passionately into her husband's arms, smothering him with kisses, wrapping her hair all about him.

"Life is too short!" she cried again and again.

HE TRIED to satisfy her and calm her, but at last pretended to sleep. She lay quietly by him, but he knew by her

short, sharp breathing that she was wide awake and restless. Then, through the sweet, resinous air of the moonlit forest came the sound of music. Constance sat upright. She listened to her husband, then satisfied that he was asleep, she ran to the window. There on the rock sat the laughing man, surrounded by the goats and the geese and the tune he played was a very old one, all within one octave. Drawing on her leather slippers, she climbed down the ivy, hurrying on eager feet to join the dance.

Paul Gallien stood in the shadow and watched her dance, all lovely and exotic in the moonlight with the goats and the geese who paced sedately with her. After the dance she sat on the rock with the man who clutched moonbeams.

"Is all well with you?" he asked her.

"All is well. The plant is growing on the oak bed. Every night the spirit enters my body. I never knew how exquisite real happiness could be. The thought of your love and your music fills my every thought."

"Life is naught without love," replied the man, laughing, as he reached into the air for the moonbeams. "Keep the plant well watered, my dear. Whenever you are not sure of yourself, follow me."

As Gallien watched from his window he thought of the old book with its pictures and knew that he had but little time to spare. Below, in the little room next to the kitchen, the old dame heard the music, crossed herself, kissed the silver cross which hung from her neck, prayed and remembered other such nights, long years gone by. She determined to ask the strangers to leave before it was too late.

The next day the young woman made her usual visit to the dark pool, carrying her little silver pitcher, while her husband went to the little village at the bottom of the valley for letters and food. There he talked with some of the young men and they went far away with a mule team, and in a week came back with a number of long iron pieces of pipe.

Came a day when Constance went to the dark pool, carrying her little silver pitcher and instead of the dark pool of water there was but a mud spot; nothing save the slime of the ages, and on the slime rested the ladder. Angry, she walked around the edge of the muddy hole and at last found where the water had all drained through long iron pipes. She looked at the giant oak and saw all the mistletoe on it was turning golden, a sign of dryness; death, decay. Crying, she ran back to the castle with her empty pitcher. Up to her bedroom!

Her husband was there arranging some of his ties. She ignored him as she ran to her side of the bed. There was no mistake. The love plant was indeed golden, on the bed as on the tree. It must have water every day from the dark pool; and now it was dead from the lack of it. She touched it, pityingly, and the leaves dropped off. All the dried berries rolled in a pitter-pattering across the floor; all the dark green had turned to golden brown. She faced her husband.

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Drain my pond?"

"I was afraid of malaria. It was the only place like it on the mountain and I did not want you to be sick."

"Fool! Fool! FOOL!" she shrieked. "If you had only asked me. Now all life is dead for me!"

"I still live," he said kindly.

At that she burst into tears and ran to him and caught him in her arms.

"I didn't mean it," she sobbed. "I didn't mean it. I was just worried and sorry because my beautiful plant died. I do have you but it may be that you die as the plant and the moon and the song of the laughing man. Everything dies, and perhaps your

candle will go out in the dark some time. Take me away from here. I am afraid! I fear the dark, and the moon will soon pale, shrink and die also."

He soothed her as best he could, caressingly, telling her they would leave in a few days; just as soon as he could get another car.

They spent that day as lovers and for long moments Constance seemed to forget her fears in the embraces of the man. At other times she looked furtively into the dark forest. They told the dame they were leaving and she sighed, saying she wished they had never come. None too happy, the bride and her husband returned to their bedroom, discussing plans for their future.

"And I think," said Paul Gallien suddenly, "that before we go we had better throw out that dead mistletoe and clean the room. Suppose we do it now? I will borrow a shears from the old woman."

He returned shortly with a great pair of shears, such scissors as the oldest Fate used to clip the thread of life. While Constance sat on the bridal chest and cried a little, he cut all the ropes and rotten sheet, then threw the dead plant and other things with it out the window. As he wiped off the oaken bedstead he remarked:

"This wood is all dry and powdery. I believe I could break it in two in my hands. The mistletoe must have taken most of the life out of it."

"It has taken most of the life out of me," the woman added under her breath.

"No. We are just beginning to live. There are so many happy days to come."

THUS and so he tried to cheer her. The work done, he placed the shears on the bed and then coaxed her to come to supper. She said she was tired and asked that they go to bed early that evening.

Returning to the room she noticed the shears on the bed, exactly in the middle of the coverlet.

"How odd you are," she said to her husband. "You left those shears on the bed, exactly in the middle. If it stays there, it will be between us all night."

"That would be a good idea," he answered gently, "you are tired and this has been a hard day for you. Thus in olden times the knights did with their swords when they wished to assure their damsels of an undisturbed night. So, you stay on your side of the shears and I will stay on mine. Thus we shall both waken refreshed on the morrow."

Half an hour passed.

"I am frightened, Paul," she whimpered. "Is that thunder I hear? Hold my hand—tight!"

He did so and went to sleep.

Then came the full moon lighting the room with its yellow beams, and the woman heard the sounds of the pipe in the dark forest. At once she knew she must go out and dance or die from desire. As she tried to rise her hair held her back. She started to pull the long braids but they still held her. At last she took courage and slid her hand down the braid till she found it wrapped round the neck of the man who had held her hand. Her hair, those long, black, snake-like tresses, was wrapped around his neck; covered his face.

She screamed; for she knew that Paul Gallien was dead; and she knew the manner of his death.

Yet the pipe called her to the dark forest.

She took the shears and cut her hair, close to her head she cut it. Strand by strand, she cut it till she was free, and as the hair loosened it clung closer to the man's face and throat as though not quite satisfied that the deed was done.

Constance took off her silken robe and spread it over the thing that lay on the bed. Under the silk all was still, save for the final convulsive twistings of the ropes of hair, tightening uselessly round the

throat of the dead. Then the woman ran to the window and climbed feverishly down the ivy. This time she did not wait to put on her slippers.

Once she reached the ground she ran to the rock. The laughing man was gone; the goats and the geese were gone; but through the woods, down the road, she heard the tones of the music, a very old tune, all within an octave, and she hastened after the song, crying:

"Oh, Pan! Wait for me! Please wait for me so I can love you and be happy."

But the laughing man walked on. The running, panting woman could come no closer to him till at last she saw him standing on the edge of the cliff. There he stood and played, waiting for her. She reached out to catch him and kiss him, but failing to touch the fantasy of his body, she plunged over the cliff, her white body curving like a falling star, till she silently became one with the crushed automobile.

The laughing man, lurking in the shadows, ran out into the moonlight and threw his open hands into the air as though to pluck the moonbeams with his questing fingers. Then he began to play his pipes anew. From the dark woods came the goats and the geese and gathered silently round him, and the song he played was all in one octave and very old. He laughed, and laughed.

"These mortals are never content. They always try to gather moonbeams—and even I cannot do that."

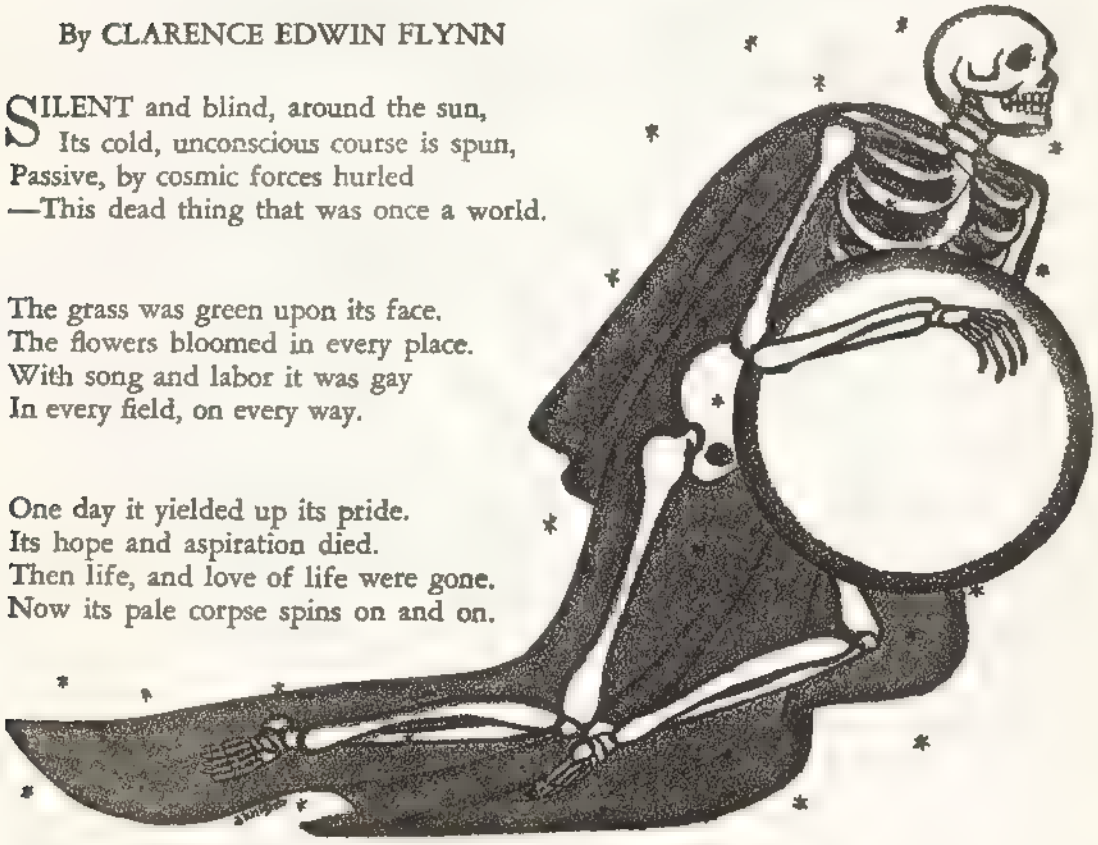
The Dead World

By CLARENCE EDWIN FLYNN

SILENT and blind, around the sun,
Its cold, unconscious course is spun,
Passive, by cosmic forces hurled
—This dead thing that was once a world.

The grass was green upon its face.
The flowers bloomed in every place.
With song and labor it was gay
In every field, on every way.

One day it yielded up its pride.
Its hope and aspiration died.
Then life, and love of life were gone.
Now its pale corpse spins on and on.



What would you think if the ramshackle shade of your first auto took to following you around?

The Ghost of the Model T

By BETSY EMMONS

NOBODY would ever have expected Phil Barnes to be haunted, because Phil wasn't the type. Phil was strictly Mr. Average, a nice enough guy, but no imagination. That's why I've had to decide that his story was the real thing. He couldn't have made it up, and it wasn't the kind of yarn you find in anthologies of spook stories. Besides, I saw the ending myself.

Phil and I were on our way up one Sunday morning to the cabin in the Catskills we share with a couple of other guys, using it now and then for hunting or fishing or just to have a man's party, away from our wives. It was warm enough to have the top down, and we were thinking about catching a nice mess of brook trout and broiling them over an open fire. Phil was driving his new car, a cream-colored convertible Flash roadster, with a black top.

We stopped in a roadside diner for ham and eggs, and when we came out we saw that another car had bumped into the Flash from behind. The other car was about the worst-looking I ever saw, a Model T, around fifteen years old. There was a peculiarly rakish curl to the front fender, and a star-shaped breakage in the windshield. The Flash hadn't suffered much—just a dented bumper and a few scratches.

"Isn't that too bad!" I said. "But I don't suppose you could collect from the owner of a jaloppy like that, even if it were worth the trouble of sueing."

Then I saw Phil's face. It was crumpled up in a way I couldn't describe, and it was a color I don't like to remember. "Calm down, old man!" I told him. "Why get upset about a scratch or two? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

Phil gave me an awful look. "Don't say that!" he gurgled. And he hurried me into the Flash, glancing back over his shoulder as if he were afraid something was coming after him. I looked back too, but all I could see was the ramshackle Model T by the curb, and I had an impression that it was moving slowly after us, but of course it couldn't have been, because there was nobody in the driver's seat.

Phil stepped on the gas and went about twenty miles in fifteen minutes before he relaxed. I was curious, but Phil's expression had been so scared when he came out of that diner that I didn't like to ask questions. He was the first to speak, and then what he said didn't seem to have anything to do with what had scared him.

"Tom," he asked, "do you remember your first car?"

"I'll say I do! Why, there's never been another one like—"

Phil raised a protesting hand from the steering wheel. "Then you know how I felt about mine. I got it around 1925, when I was seventeen, and I blew the proceeds of a summer's work for it. And gosh, how I loved it!"

"I know," I said sympathetically. "Now, I got mine—"

"It was a sweet little car, too, for those days," Phil went on. "A Model T. I was so proud of it, I used to get up nights and go out to the garage and see if it was still there. You know how a kid can be. Why, I'd pat it like you'd pat a horse. I spent every week-end shining it up and kept it brimful of gas and oil. Every few months I'd have it checked over, just in case."

By this time I was letting Phil talk himself out, though I couldn't see where he was getting. "I kept it six years," he told me. "A long time. But, you know, I was so fond of it I couldn't bear to give it up. You think I'm screwy?"

"Not at all," I said. "I know just how—"

"Why, I felt like it was part of my family! I felt it respond. The wheel practically turned of itself in my hands. I felt that it was fond of me too. I *knew* it was."

"Don't get so excited, Phil," I said. "I get you. But what's this all about?"

Well, he went on to tell me the story. He was working his way up in business, and a good appearance, including a good-looking car, was important in his line of work.

So he finally traded the Model T in, and didn't know what became of it. About that time the company he was working for moved him to Texas. And after he'd been in Texas awhile, he fell in love.

OF COURSE a man in love never knows what has hit him. She was pretty, Phil said, and flirtatious. He was still a young man, and didn't bother to find out what she was really like. But he did notice one thing, that she was pretty much impressed by anything showy. Nice places, good clothes, big cars. So Phil got himself a new car. He didn't mind trading in the one he had at the time, because he'd never really gotten fond of it, like he'd been of the old Model T.

The new car was a Streamline Special, bright green, with white-walled tires. Phil called the girl up and said, "Look, honey, put on your best clothes. I've got a new car that'll knock your eyes out, and we're going riding." She was thrilled pink. She came into the room all done up in furs and flowers, and said that she just couldn't wait to see the car.

Phil told her to look out the window, and stood back with a big grin waiting to hear her exclaim. But she turned to him and said, very nastily, "If you think that's a good joke, Philip Barnes, just think again. Trying to be so funny! You just get in that old rattletrap and drive away. If you think I'm going out with you in that, you're crazy."

Phil went to the window and saw that another car had come up behind the Streamline Special, where it was the first thing the girl would see. He started to laugh and say, "Why, honey, you're making a mistake."

Then he looked at her again, and saw that her pretty face didn't look pretty with the angry, sullen expression on it. And it occurred to him that she must be mighty dumb, and mighty snobbish. And he thought about the kind of wife a girl like that would make, and made a few pleasant remarks and picked up his hat and drove away in the Streamline Special. A couple of years later, he met Susan and married her, and every now and then he's taken time off to thank his lucky stars he saw through the girl in Texas before it was too late.

"But," Phil finished his story, "before I went away in the Streamline Special, I had a look at the car behind. And, Tom, it was my old Model T! I knew by the way the front fender was bent and the windshield was splintered."

"That's quite a coincidence," I told him.

"Yeah," said Phil. "Coincidence. Well, next place the company sent me was to Washington, and of course I didn't ever expect to see the old buggy again. But I did."

"Did you?" I asked. I was beginning to suspect what was up by now, though I couldn't really believe that Phil meant it. Phil took a deep breath.

"The first time I saw it," he said, "the time I just told you about, it did me a good turn in my private life. But the second time—well, I'll tell you." He'd been about to close a big order, Phil said, with a guy named W. G. Foxbaum. Foxbaum was an odd bird. He kept a Flit gun of antiseptic in his office and sprayed everything each hour, on account of germs. He had a fixation on the idea of absolute cleanliness. Anyone who wanted an order from Foxbaum had to show up with his pants pressed and his nails manicured, or he didn't stand a chance.

Phil was all set, and he had an appointment with Foxbaum at three o'clock to wind up the details. Foxbaum was as strong on punctuality as he was on neatness, and Phil was planning to be there on time. He'd had his pants cleaned and pressed. He'd had a shave and a manicure and a haircut. He was going down the street, very spruce, with his briefcase in his hand. He was so anxious not to be even half a minute late, because of the way those things counted with Foxbaum, that he was crossing the street against a red light when a car came up from behind and nuzzled him.

"Nuzzled?" I asked.

"Nuzzled," Phil affirmed. And he went on to tell how he'd lost his balance and fallen into a mud-puddle. He dropped the briefcase and it opened and his papers got all splashed with mud and water. So did his nice, clean pants. By the time he'd picked himself up, cursing, he just saw the rear end of the car going around the corner. But he was sure that it was his old Model T.

"I didn't know whether to take time off to get cleaned up and arrive late, or to arrive on time in the mess I was in," Paul finished. "So I compromised. I got brushed off and straightened out my papers as well as I could, which wasn't very good, and I got to Foxbaum's office only fifteen minutes late and only moderately dirty, and I lost the order. Two weeks later Foxbaum went bankrupt, owing fifty thousand dollars."

I said, "Funny coincidence, huh?"

"Yeah," said Phil. "Too funny. I wrote to the Motor Vehicle Bureau, and they traced the Model T for me. Seems that a year after I'd sold it, the car was sold again to a junk dealer, and as far as they knew it's been standing in a junkyard ever since."

"That's impossible," I said.

"Sure it's impossible," said Phil. "But, did you notice, when we saw the car outside the diner, that it didn't have any license plates? That it was sort of dusty? *That it didn't look as if it belonged to anyone?*"

"Phil," I said, "I see what you're getting at, and I think you're nuts. You figure that car has been—"

"Yeah," said Phil. "That's what I figure. It was junked, and it got out, and it's been following me all over the country. It's found me twice, and both times the company moved me away right afterwards, so it had to start out again. Now it's found me once more, and it's going to follow me. It's fond of me. Tom!" His voice rose in a shrill crescendo. "Tom!" he yelled. "It can't happen! A car can't do that! Can it, Tom?"

"Of course it can't," I said. "Obviously not. You'll never see it again." But there were prickles up and down my spine. Because, though I tried to tell myself it was just Phil's suggestion that made me think

so, it didn't seem to me that there *had* been any license plates on the old Model T parked out in front of the diner.

BY THE time Phil and I got up to the Catskills, he'd calmed down a bit. After a day of fishing, he was quite himself again. He even essayed a word or two of apology. "I guess you thought I was nuts, Tom," he said. "Maybe I am. Of course, you were right. It was just a series of coincidences, and my imagination."

"I'm sure of it," I answered. But I really wasn't sure at all because, as I've said, Phil had no imagination. None at all. And there were points in his story that a man would have needed imagination to make up.

Anyhow, everything was serene when we started back, and even the Sunday traffic on the Storm King Highway didn't bother us. The spring dusk was lovely, and we could hear the fresh noise of waters coming down the slopes. Of course, we didn't pay any more attention than people usually do to the signs which said "Drive Carefully" and "Watch Out for Falling Rocks."

Then everything happened at once.

We were going around an especially narrow, dangerous curve, and another car came up behind us on the outside, forcing us over against the rock wall. Phil cursed under his breath, watching the other car pass horribly close to the steep slope beside us.

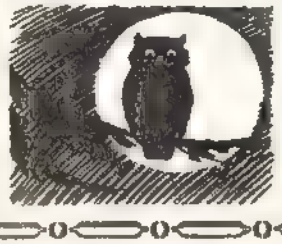
"Darn fool!" he said. "Risking his life like that." He wrenched the wheel over. And then the car ahead came suddenly to a stop, making Phil jam his brakes on abruptly. There was barely time for me to experience a sickening flash of realization as to the identity of that other car, when a roaring, gnashing noise sounded above our heads.

And, down upon the road ahead, smashing the other car to a crumpled heap of tin, came a thirty-ton boulder. And then another, and another, streams of boulders of all sizes, enough to crush any car into nothingness and send its occupants to glory.

In a minute, it was all over. The echoes died away, and the mountains again were silent. Phil and I got out and ran to look at the car on the road ahead, the little Model T which had been buried and crushed under the gigantic rocks of the landslide.

Ghost car or not, it would never run again. Phil laid a hand on the battered fender which projected from the wreckage, then straightened up slowly and looked at me. "If it hadn't forced us to stop," he said, "we'd have been in the path of that."

I nodded. Neither of us wanted to talk about it. We peered under the boulders which lay atop the car, into the front seat, searching for a driver, but both of us knew beforehand that there was no driver in the car, and no license plates, nor any signs of human life or ownership.



INTO FANTASY

BY MARIA MORAVSKY

MIDNIGHT strikes. An owl hoots
I am sick of hope and delays.
I will brew mandragora roots,
To drug my humdrum days.

The Candle

By RAY BRADBURY

On the bronze candle base was inscribed: "The man who will in trouble be, soon surely sees the light in me."

UNDER other circumstances it might have been idle curiosity that caused Jules Marcott to pause before the little hardware store window; but tonight it was a cold lump of hopelessness and anger knotted in his heart.

Now there was nothing to be done but

stare at hard, glittering objects, metal objects with triggers and barrels, wondering whether bullets and steel really ended all worry.

"Which they do not," muttered Jules to the bearded, tousel-haired reflection of himself in the glass.

A cold winter wind was busy in the street and busier in Jules Marcott's mind. His thin lips pursed against the bladed chill, blue and quivering.

In the shop window a clutter of bric-a-brac, knick-knacks, metal ornaments and artillery had been heaped haphazardly, catching the uneasy, snow-white glare of the street lamp.

Grimly Jules thought of the display as a symbol of his own life; heaped, jumbled, rusted, forgotten, useless. No point.

He stared into the jumble of metal; antique guns, matchlocks, blunderbusses, Lugers, sawed-off shotguns, miniature garter-pistols and a million and one other rusted weapons idling there.

"A good gun," mused Marcott, squinting dark eyes, hunching lean shoulders in his overcoat. "A good *aim*—a good *shot*." But he shook his head. "And the rest of my life in prison. That wouldn't do. That's not solving it, but working myself deeper—"

He cursed, was about to turn away, when something oddly out of place caught his eye. His black brows arched up on his slender pale face.

In the very center of the window, in the midst of the cluttered metal, rose a blue-pastel candle, slim and tall and worked in the figure of a young, long-haired maid, naked and fine-limbed.

It was such a strange candle and it occupied such a unique position that Jules Marcott momentarily forgot his marital problem to center his nervous attentions upon it.

Jules admired it for a number of seconds, casting about for the reasons why the proprietor of this untidy hardware shop should place such an incongruously ethereal figure in the tangled whirlpool of penny-nails and pistols.

The candle held center stage, misting the weapons into the background. It pervaded all, seemed, rather, to be already aflame and spilling a steady, pure glow over all the window; and out, touching Jules' face with a soft finger of pastel light.

But it was not lighted. And yet it emanated light, it was luminescent.

THERE was something infinitely peaceful about this candle. The figure was postured erect, but it seemed relaxed, contented. The face had the unrippled, dream-like contour of the Lotus Buddha. It promised many things with its serenity.

It offered surcease from worry and—something *else*. Something ominously fleeting. Other lights flickered within the candle torso, things uninterpretable. Jules considered the guns again, and then the candle, and, once more, the guns.

And even in these hours of many emotions, predominant in Jules was curiosity. Curiosity and appreciation of beauty.

So it was that Jules' thin hand was upon the knob of the shop-door before he realized it. The door sagged in on hoarse hinges, shut behind him, complaining.

Momentarily, Marcott had forgotten his wife, Helen. Now he had seen something intangible and wished to touch it, perhaps even buy it.

A candle so unusual that it offered to fill the vacant portions of his soul. A candle that offered—what?—better things than guns to solve his problem.

Out of the cool cavern of the shop, from a gloomy alcove behind a counter, appeared the proprietor. He was a contrast to Jules.

Where Marcott was tall, pale, jet-haired and thin, this proprietor was short, round, apple-cheeked. A toothless, big-nosed

ancient with a shock of winter-snow hair tangling about full ears.

The proprietor moved quietly, smacking his lips, wiping hands on a dirty smock that covered his bulging stomach, wagging his head. He was a little too cheerful amidst the dust and rusted metal and shadows.

"What, sir?" he said, cheerfully. "There's no doubt but you'll have either a pistol or the candle!"

He sized Marcott up with two quick thrusts of his eyes, which, though blue, did not offer the friendliness displayed by the body. They were strangely alert and not warm.

Jules felt a distinct dislike for the man, for the man's abrupt attitude. It was a little too sudden and strange.

Marcott did not speak immediately. He could give no reason for entering the shop; could find no explanation for his curious action. He was bewildered.

"No. No," he said suddenly, awkwardly. "I—I don't want a *pistol!*"

"Of course you don't."

The proprietor blinked rapidly, shaking a finger. "Of course you don't. Pistols are much too messy." The fat body waddled between cluttered counters thick with nails, knobs and other glittering objects. Reaching the window he bent, breathing asthmatically, and with gentle, chubby hands picked up a pale-blue candle. His face creased into a toothless grin as he returned to Marcott.

"And if you do not wish a pistol, then you want the candle. Everyone who comes to my shop buys either a gun or this taper." He shook his head. "The fools use the guns in their desperation."

He offered the unlighted taper to Jules. "And the wise man lights a taper. Here."

The candle was bedded in a small heavy circlet of bronze, exquisitely carved with puckish elfin heads and an inscription in some ancient scrawl.

As Jules clasped it he felt a quick warm snake of confidence strike him and crawl twining up his arms into his being. It was like dawn after a thunderstorm.

The proprietor gestured to the window. "I do a great business," he declared, heartily. "*Not* in hardware, and *not* to the ordinary person. I sell to fools and wisemen. Mostly fools." The red lips smacked moistly. "The world is full of them. Now—this candle—"

He paused, and his eyes became slits, his voice dropped. "This candle, when lighted of an evening, will perform many tasks in many ways. Both pleasant and unpleasant."

He tapped the bronze candle base.

"The inscription—"

Marcott could not readily translate it. Its foreign scrabble gave no message to his dark eyes. He shook his head.

The proprietor translated:

"The man who will in trouble be,
Soon surely sees the light in me."

Marcott stared unblinkingly at the blue tallow, his fingers tight upon the base.

"How do you know I am in trouble?" he asked.

A streak of white moved across the dim shop floor. A milk-furred kitten ceased running and stopped to play tag with Marcott's overcoat. Jules ignored it as the proprietor gave answer.

"All who come here bear one form of trouble or other. None enter here for nails and hammers. I have seen to that. And you, like the others, are tormented. I know not what shape or form this torment may assume, but now it darkens your existence and you wish to forget it. And forgetting can only be accomplished, at times, by destroying something. What do you wish to destroy?"

Marcott did not trust the proprietor. He did not speak aloud. But in his brain six words materialized instantly, vividly:

"I wish to kill a man!"

THE shadows in the hardware shop wavered a fraction closer. The blue candle, though flameless, glowed, and the milk-white kitten who gamboled at Marcott's feet, paused and cocked its head up, staring at him with large green eyes, as if it knew his every thought.

Marcott wet his lips thoughtfully, feeling that he should say something. So, he said, "This candle isn't a weapon," rather matter-of-factly.

"The kiss of a woman," replied the proprietor, "is the most lethal of all weapons. Yet, who looks on it as such? Judge a thing not by its looks, but by its deeds."

Jules doubted.

"This candle will destroy," said the proprietor.

"How?"

Jules thought angrily of Eldridge, the man he hated, the man he wished to kill. And he thought of Helen.

The proprietor answered. His voice was cheerless.

"You light the candle in the evening hours. You wait until it has flamed steadily for a number of minutes. Then, three times, you breathe the name of the person you wish to destroy."

"This done, the designated individual will conclude his existence immediately."

Marcott was wary. The passing minutes had given him opportunity to collect his wits. It sounded too utterly simple to be accepted in the sunlight of reason, to stand the probing of the scalpel of intellect.

But Marcott's problem demanded a solution. This trouble with Helen, his wife, and Eldridge, her lawyer friend, was not an easy one.

Marcott held the candle close, forming words.

"How do I know that this candle works?" he said. "What sort of witchcraft is this?"

"You do not believe?"

"No. I do not."

"Then—I will show you."

The proprietor struck a match. The flame glittered in his deep blue eyes, and on the snowy hair and ruddy face.

He lit the candle. He waited a few moments.

Previously, without flame, the candle had filled the room with soft, wondrous light from its phosphorescent body. Now, flamed, it shot out torrents of soul-filling brilliance that was like the illumination of a great full moon.

Marcott sensed something moving softly against his legs. He looked down. It was the furry white cat with the huge green eyes still staring up at him, mewing, clawing at his coat-tail, exposing a red tongue.

Marcott heard the proprietor murmuring three times. Three times the old man spoke, and his breath made the candle flame lean to one side, quivering.

The candle flickered. . . .

And the cat, one moment playfully alert at Jules' feet, the next crying out in animal pain, leaped as if kicked, clawed the air, rolling and writhing and spitting.

For a moment it recovered. It leaped up, gained a hold upon the counter next to Jules and tumbled over into a nest of metal. Then it spit froth and blood, snarling. Its little, milk-colored head twisted as if an invisible hand were wringing it. The green eyes bulged nightmarishly. The little red tongue was caught between clamped teeth. It gave one last convulsive shudder, jerked, and fell silent, its tail twitching.

IT WAS dead.

Jules sickened suddenly. His face paled, his thin lips were dry and he swayed unsteadily. He turned away from the kitten and looked at the candle with the oddly peaceful feminine figure, the contented face.

The proprietor blew the flame out. "You see—it works?"

Jules nodded.

The proprietor handed the candle back to Marcott. "I cannot sell you the candle," he said, softly. "But I can rent it to you for a short period of time. You pay half when you rent, half when you accomplish your work and return. Fair?"

A throng of thoughts crowded Jules' mind. He had little money saved. And he had proof, horrible proof, that the candle worked. Here in the shadows he could not doubt. Rationality had fled. But he didn't want to spend too much money. A bullet might be cheaper—maybe—

He feared to ask the price.

"Three thousand dollars . . ." came the answer to the unworded question.

THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS!

As well demand a ton of soil from the planet Mars! Jules Marcott's bank account advanced to three pitiful figures.

But with the unreasoning blindness of a potential killer, Marcott would not, could not give up this candle and its alleged powers.

He whirled and started for the door.

"I have no money," he said. "Let me use the candle and pay later!"

"Money!" The proprietor poked out a red fist. "Or return the candle, quickly! I hold no commerce with the poor!"

"I'll pay you when I get the money! I—"

"Wait, then!"

The proprietor lunged at Marcott with open hands.

Jules wheeled to one side, snatched up the first fistful of metal touching his hands, a cumbersome blunderbuss and struck with it, clumsily.

The weapon hit. The proprietor shrieked with pain, fell flat, unconscious. Not dead.

Hastily, hiding the blue candle figurine in his overcoat, Jules departed the shop of cluttered shadows. He hurried into the marrow biting chill and strode down the street. Through his mind slipped the vision of the kitten dying, the translation of the ancient inscription on the bronze candle-base:

"He who will in trouble be,
Will quickly see the light in me!"

And now—to mete out vengeance on the head of the man who loved and took Helen away. And simultaneously to teach Helen a lesson she would never forget.

Her divorce from Jules would be of no avail now. Eldridge, her lover, would die.

Marcott walked swiftly, confidently.

JULES MARCOTT fitted the red ribbon bow to the package with trembling fingers. Then he penned a carefully worded note to his wife, slipped it into an envelope and attached it to the box containing the blue candle.

It was much better this way. To send the package, the candle and the curse directly to Helen, let her follow slightly altered directions. Let hers be the lips to pronounce the doom and death of Eldridge, hers the white fingers to light the taper, bringing destruction.

Better this way. More ironic. More searing, more unbearable for her. He wanted to hurt her intensely. For now, with all the power of a blighted existence, he hated Helen.

Jules thought, was it not Oscar Wilde who wrote: "Each man kills the thing he loves?"

So let Helen kill John Eldridge.

Jules checked the package very carefully. He picked it up, handed it to the waiting Western Union messenger.

"Deliver this immediately—to Helen Marcott, 413 Grant Street."

The messenger left.

Marcott broke seal on a new packet of cigarettes. He noted the time. Eight o'clock. A night wind mourned outside.

It would take the messenger twenty min-

utes to deliver the candle. And Helen scheduled her leave for Reno in the morning, to divorce Jules and marry Eldridge.

Twenty minutes for the package to be delivered. Five minutes for her to open it, read the enclosed note.

And then—how long?

How many minutes before Eldridge died? An hour, two hours, and, if Helen were rushed, perhaps not tonight, but surely tomorrow night. Helen was sentimental. Jules counted on that quality. She would follow directions implicitly.

Marcott lit his third cigarette.

When he finished his tenth cigarette it was nine-fifteen. The package had been delivered. Now, all he had to do was wait. Go to bed and restlessly count the hours? No. Better to get out and walk in the park, breathe the night air. He'd know soon enough about Eldridge.

Marcott chuckled. What if Eldridge fell dead right in front of Helen? Lord, would that be revenge.

Jules laughingly ground out his cigarette and left his small, transient apartment.

So Helen was going to get a divorce. She disapproved of Jules and his meddling with psychology and mental diseases. She didn't like this and she didn't like that. So she was skipping off to Reno like a confused little animal.

Marcott smiled as he locked the door and pocketed the key. What was it she had said only three weeks ago? Something about Svengali, meaning Jules, and herself as Trilby? That was funny.

Strange that a woman could run off because of one quarrel. But Helen was a changeable woman. Anyway—

Tomorrow morning—obituary column —the name Eldridge—

BUSY with his thoughts, Jules scarce noticed the direction in which he wandered until it was too late. He strode in a mist of hopes and desires, until his ears, coming out of the fog of thought, heard brisk scuffling heels catching up with him. The sound of asthmatic breathing filled the night air.

A fat hand clutched Marcott's coat, twisted him about. A red, chubby face, toothless and angry, was thrust close. "Where is the candlestick?"

The hardware store proprietor!

Marcott expressed no immediate excitement. After all, Helen had the candle. Even now the final curtain in John Eldridge's life was being rung down.

Jules quietly lit another cigarette before he answered the shopkeeper. Then:

"I don't know your name, but you're definitely impolite. I assure you that if I did know your name I would promptly light the candle and put an end to you."

The shopkeeper clenched thick fists in rage. "I'll call the police!"

"Come now." Jules laughed softly. "Being in your sort of business, such an action wouldn't pay, would it?" He flicked his cigarette ashes disdainfully. "I'll return your candlestick when it has done its work."

"I demand it *now!*"

"I don't have it."

"Who—"

"I sent it to my wife."

"What's your name?"

The dark smile did not leave Jules' face. "If you knew my name and retrieved the candle, then I'd be in a pretty fix, wouldn't I?" He shook his head. "You won't know it. Because if you did, then I'd take measures to insure your never finding your precious candle again."

The fat shopkeeper stopped breathing as hastily. He waited a moment, licking fat cherry-red lips, fingers shaking, the fat body swaying. Finally: "You—you will —you *promise* to return the candlestick?" There was a flicker of pleading in the voice.

"Was that your *only* wonder-working

device?" laughed Marcott. "How inefficient! Yes, I'll return it as soon as possible, granting of course that you never know my name. You should be thankful I didn't look you up in the phone book to give your life to the flame."

"You should not have let it get out of your hands," muttered the old man. "What if it is lost?"

"It will not be lost. I sent it to my wife, enclosing a note, telling her it was—well, it was a clever idea of mine, all around. She's divorcing me, plans on marrying a man named Eldridge. They plane to Reno in the morning. But I thought of a rather interesting and different way of utilizing the candle to get rid of Eldridge. I'll let Helen—"

A brisk wind came up, drowning out Jules' voice, so that he had to speak louder, but speak he did. The little shopkeeper listened, nodding, approving in spite of himself, almost smiling.

The wind blew wilder and the stars were very clear. Jules thought, it is a glorious night. But—

One more question.

"The victim of the candle," asked Jules. "When the spell is cast, what happens? Is it very bad?"

The shopkeeper nodded ominously.

"You saw what happened to the cat? Well—"

HELEN MARCOTT jerked back as the hand cracked across her cheek for the second time. Tears started to her full brown eyes and the marks of John Eldridge's fingers scarred her face.

Eldridge stood over her. Then he whirled and went to the door. He turned, his face ugly and suffused. His eyes cut first at Helen Marcott and then at the freshly opened box, the box in which reclined the feminine blue-pastel candle.

"Gifts from your husband! Behind my back!" he grated. "What am I supposed to think? After all we supposedly meant to each other! Well, if you want *me*, you'll find me at—"

The door slammed, slicing off Eldridge's voice.

Helen Marcott heard his footsteps drumming down the hall out of her life. And tears streaked down her cheeks over the fresh red marks left by Eldridge's hand when he had slapped her.

He had *slapped* her!

All over a gift from Jules. All over a blue candle. Helen Marcott tried to think clearly. She was seeing Eldridge concisely for the first time.

She was still crying, thinking about her disillusionment in Eldridge, when she struck a match. Carefully she set the candle on the table next to herself and lit it.

She paused. The candle looked so peaceful and contented.

Helen Marcott picked up the letter Jules had thoughtfully enclosed. How gentle, how nice of him.

She read the letter over again, taking in every word.

> "Darling Helen: A little remembrance to show that there are no hard feelings. This is a prayer candle. To bring good fortune and happiness to the one you love, light the candle in the evening and, three times, repeat the name of your beloved.
>
> "With fond memories,
>
> "JULES."

Helen Marcott brushed away the tears. She turned to the flaming candlestick. Her gentle breath touched the flame, three times, quietly, fervently, longingly, as she said: "Jules—Jules—Jules—"

The candle flame flickered.

After all, the murderer had only sent Peter Larkin a coffin, a knife and other pleasant little gifts . . .

The Lips of Caya Wu

By FRANK OWEN

I

PETER LARKIN'S death had been accomplished with complete efficiency. At four thirty on Wednesday he had locked the door of his private office, written terse farewell notes to a few business associates, consumed half a quart of whiskey, then fired a bullet into his heart.

Death was instantaneous. He was still clutching the revolver when they found him.

The authorities tabulated it as suicide, and the case was closed. But his friend, Kerle Andrews, a free-lance feature writer had a hunch that it was murder, and not without reason. Francis Channing had phoned him and there was panic in his voice. He was Peter Larkin's greatest friend. Why was he so perturbed? Why did he want Kerle Andrews to come to his office at once? It was an interesting item to chew on. He was always on the alert for new ideas, and here was a plot ready-made.

II

When Kerle Andrews arrived at Channing's office in the Graybar Building, the architect was in a state bordering on hysteria, walking up and down the room, his colorless face resembling a death mask.

As Kerle Andrews was announced by a clerk, he said, "I came as quick as I could."

"It's a relief to see you," Channing declared huskily.

"What's the matter? Are you sick?"

Channing laughed mirthlessly. "Yes, I'm sick, sick of living, and yet afraid to die. I lack Pete Larkin's courage. I do not feel sorry about his passing; on the contrary, I envy him."

"Perhaps he, too, was sick of living."

"Anyway, he's dead."

"But that doesn't explain your present state, or does it? You appear as though you had seen a ghost."

"I've seen worse than that."

"What do you mean?"

"Chan Kien is in town."

"That doesn't mean a thing to me," said Kerle Andrews bluntly. "What should my reaction be, one of terror?"

"If you were in my place, it would be."

"If you'd tell a coherent story, perhaps I could help you."

Francis Channing collapsed into a chair as though his knees had buckled under him. "Without the shadow of a doubt, Chan Kien is the key to Peter Larkin's murder. As you know, for many years Pete and I were inseparable friends. Once we toured the Orient together. It was a most lucrative enterprise. We dabbled in a hundred different schemes, trading in silks, porcelains, amber and jade after a fashion. Peter had a faculty for shrewd buying. We shipped all the stuff we bought to August Galt, an import and export merchant in New York City who happened to be our mutual friend. All three of us shared equally in the profits. Later, years later in fact, Galt and Larkin quarreled over this partnership."

"You do not suspect Galt of being implicated in any way with the murder," Kerle Andrews broke in. As he put the question, he studied his companion's expression intently. Though he was extremely upset, there could be no denying his sincerity.

"Not in the slightest degree," Channing answered quickly. "May I proceed?"

"Do."

"Now it so happened that in our travels we met Chan Kien. His home was in the Gobi Desert, a legendary home, for it was rumored he lived in a cave in the mountains and crept forth only at night. Some even said he was a fox who dashed about the country in the moonlight. He could change his form at will. Pete Larkin and I met Chan Kien in Peiping. He laughed over the fantasies that were told about him. 'It is good for a man not to be understood,' he averred, 'for then people never lose interest in him.' What nobody knew about Chan Kien would have filled a book. He was immensely rich and had homes scattered over a wide area of China. No one knew where he would be sleeping on a certain night. He did this to confound his enemies. A rich man is always

at the mercy of brigands and frequently brigands had been at the mercy of Chan Kien in his office of magistrate, for among his host of duties was that of meting out justice. In this he was somewhat of an epicure. When a head had to roll in the dust, he insisted that the axe be sharp so there need be no unnecessary suffering. Pete and I did much trading with him in carved ivories, amber, nephrites and jades. Chan Kien was a connoisseur of jade and women and it so happened that in his house in Peiping where he was accustomed to receive us, lived a girl of languid beauty named Caya Wu. She was slim and dark and lovely. Her lips were like splashes of blood against the pearls of her teeth. When she walked through the enclosed garden upon which the rooms of the house opened, she swayed in so reed-like a manner it was impossible not to be charmed. Pete Larkin beheld her through an open window as she walked in the garden. Impulsively, he said, 'Who is yon lovely girl?' Chan Kien did not like the question. In China it is bad form to discuss the women of the household with the master. Nevertheless, Chan replied, 'She is a golden slave that I recently purchased.'

"IMPULSIVELY Peter Larkin asked, 'Care to sell?' At that an expression flitted momentarily across the face of Chan Kien that was not pleasant to behold, even though his voice remained affable, as he said, 'She was a slave but she is a slave no longer. Any woman I hold in my arms is thereafter a free woman. That is the gift I bestow upon her. As for Caya Wu, she is happy here. All my wealth I lay at her feet. She commands my heart.' That ended the discussion but Pete Larkin smiled as he lighted a cigarette. Chan Kien went back into the Gobi the next morning and we returned to our hotel.

"I thought the incident was closed but I reasoned incorrectly. Something about Caya Wu had imbedded itself so deeply in Pete Larkin's mind he could think of nothing else. And he decided that he must possess Caya Wu though it was the last thing he did on earth. The Chinese believe that woman is a wanton creature always waiting to go astray. Whether or not that is true, it certainly was the case with Caya Wu. She was nothing more than a lovely courtesan. She had no soul. Fire did not burn her. When Peter made overtures to her, her smile was warm and friendly. Before long they were meeting clandestinely in the garden of her house under the spell of a spring moon. When two people are happy, the Chinese believe, it is always spring even though it be fur coat weather. Then one night Chan Kien returned unexpectedly. When he did not find her in any of the various rooms of the house that squared the garden, he walked down one of the marble paths to where a willow tree formed friendly shadows, and there he found them in close embrace. Chan Kien sighed. It was a perfect night. It seemed a shame to be forced to shatter the rhythm of the garden by unseemly actions, but there was work for him to do. Like steel claws he extended his fingers. They groped about in the dark until they found her white jade throat. How soft was her flesh as his fingers leaped to destroy it. It was a night of poetry and dream. Had Tu Fu still lived, he might have written a lyric, 'To the Blue Face of Caya, Dying.' Even as her breath ceased, even as the perfume of her lips no longer mingled with the soft songs of the flowers, Chan Kien noticed the startled, masklike, terror-stricken face of Peter Larkin. When Chan Kien had assured himself that Caya Wu would no longer be disturbed by figures of earth, his fingers wearily relaxed. Now they sought the neck of Pete Larkin to complete their handiwork, but Pete fled ignominiously with the speed of the wind as though all the terrors that haunt the

dusk were at his heels. It was the only time to my knowledge he had ever been frightened of anything. When he returned to our hotel he was a pitiable, craven thing."

Francis Channing paused for a moment and licked his dry lips. When he spoke again his voice was almost inaudible. "A few hours later we left Peiping never to return, banished by fear, fear of the retribution Chan Kien would exact from us if we remained in China, for Pete Larkin had intruded upon a romance so beautiful it might have inspired T'ang poets. We returned to New York. Several years passed and we had begun to breathe easier. Then Chan Kien suddenly appeared in New York. He had been in town about three months. I am sure that Peter Larkin collided with him many times. I am sure that Chan Kien committed the murder."

III

BY APPOINTMENT that evening, Kerle Andrews called at the house on upper Fifth Avenue which Chan Kien had rented temporarily during his sojourn in America. Of all people, the Chinese are the most courteous; therefore when Kerle Andrews telephoned Chan Kien, he had been at once invited to share a cup of pearl-orchid-scented tea with him. As Kerle Andrews stood on the doorstep and rang the bell, immediately, as if by magic, Shung Kung appeared in the doorway, bowing graciously. Shunk Kung was Chan Kien's personal servant, constant companion, and friend.

"My master is awaiting you," he said.

Through a dimly lighted hall he led the way. Kerle Andrews was astonished and enthralled at the wealth of porcelains, tapestries and carved jade ornaments that made the hall lush with subdued color and warmth. On the air floated fragrance like unto sandalwood. The next moment they had entered the library and Chan Kien came forward to greet his guest.

"Welcome," said he graciously. "In this world we are all travelers and I am gratified that you chose to stop for a moment at my house. It is thereby honored."

As he spoke, he motioned Kerle Andrews to a chair in the shadows while he himself seated himself by an ebony table on which a lamp was lighted. "So that you may study my expression with less difficulty," he smiled. "But even though the rays of the lamp fall flush upon my face, a proverb of my people comes to mind, 'A candle as big as a cup cannot illuminate tomorrow.' Ask me whatever question you wish but I assure you I will keep my broken arm inside my sleeve."

He clapped his hands together and Shung Kung brought tea. The fragile cups were no thicker than flower petals. As Shung Kung poured the tea, Chan Kien said, "Let us drink, tea makes all men brothers."

As Kerle Andrews lifted a cup to his lips, he surveyed his host.

Chan Kien had exceptionally good features. His nose was well formed, his mouth was firm though somewhat cruel. He smiled too much. His eyes were keen, black, brilliant as new steel. They told nothing except that the mind they mirrored was indomitable. Channing had pointed out that in his own country Chan Kien was, among other things, a magistrate who dispensed justice at a city on the fringe of the Gobi Desert with the relentlessness of an absolute monarch. In that small city his word was law. In high circles he was all powerful. Besides there was a mysterious hidden side to his life. Few knew anything about this, and those who did spoke of it only in whispers to people whom they could trust.

Chan Kien was a student of character. Kerle Andrews interested him. He liked rapier-like minds that he could challenge

to verbal combat. He knew his visitor was shrewd, that he had come there with a definite purpose, that he was a worthy antagonist. A war of words was a tonic of relaxation. It burned away ennui, it quickened the blood. But he waited for his opponent to make the first move. Therefore with a fine air of studied casualness, he picked up a volume of fragile poems, legends, sketches, lyrics in jade.

"The vexing thing about these poems," he reflected, "is that they are better than the originals, from an American viewpoint, which is true of so many things in this amazing country. The greatest lie in any of your great men's lives is their obituaries. The way dead men are eulogized gives me the feeling that they must have been guilty of grave crimes. In our country we believe that the vast power of Heaven and Earth make them like unto deities. Therefore the dead, buried in the earth, are protected by the great powers of the universe."

"No thought could be more beautiful," Andrews interposed, "but then the Chinese people have acute understanding. What better emblem could be found than their bundled firewood as a symbol of contentment!"

"I am humbled that you appreciate the simple philosophy of my people." He sighed gently, before he added, "However, I doubt if you came here today merely to repeat proverbs. Surely there must be some slight service I can render you."

"There is indeed," said Andrews, equally as abrupt. "The reason I came here tonight was because I wished to converse with you about Caya Wu."

At that Chan Kien's expression underwent a change. The mask slipped and his face was horrible to behold. He sprang from his chair, his fingers clawing the air.

Kerle Andrews eyed him coolly, seeming in no way perturbed, but his muscles were taut, ready to go into action instantly if occasion required. Then with a visible effort, Chan Kien caught control of himself and with a sigh that was almost a groan he fell back into his chair. He closed his eyes. Now once more the mask was adjusted. But his face bore a sickly pallor and he seemed to have trouble in breathing.

"You came to my house as a friend," he whispered intensely, "then why did you mention Caya Wu?"

"What matter, since she is dead?"

"She is not dead! She dwells in my heart. And when I sit alone in a room I can feel her presence as though she is reading over my shoulder. Man's life is naught but a tragedy, a tragedy with laughter. But what interest can you possibly have in my beloved?"

"Because I believe that the death of Peter Larkin is traceable to his association with her."

"So you are aware of what happened in China?"

"Definitely. Now I am attempting to discover what happened in New York since your arrival. It is my belief you are traveling down the long old road of memory."

"If you mean I never forget, I plead guilty. That is my fault. But I did not kill Peter Larkin. It would have been a pleasure, but he saved me the trouble. He committed suicide. Your police have spoken. Who am I to contradict?"

"So I see," said Kerle Andrews curtly, "you only know what you read in the papers."

"Do you doubt that Peter Larkin committed suicide?"

"No, but I am interested in the motive. Why did he commit suicide while you were in America?"

"That was his concern, not mine. To show him I bore him no ill will I sent him a long thin knife with a carved ivory handle. It was a beautiful thing. Again I sent him a mahogany coffin. In my coun-

try that is esteemed as a present to cherish. What more could I do for him?"

"What more did you do?" asked Kerle Andrews bluntly. "As for your gracious gifts, I'd say a sharp knife biting into one's flesh might cause death comparatively without pain. Therefore I am surprised that Peter Larkin chose death by a bullet. The thin knife death would have been far more poetical. As for the gift of a coffin to a man with overwrought nerves, it's appalling. You chose your presents well. They are interesting to muse over. It is subtle revenge indeed to send such implements to the man whom you are stalking."

"They were tributes to mark my forgiveness."

"And also symbols of death."

"YOU are both blunt and keen at the same time. In China we have a saying that a man cannot live under the same sky as the murderer of a member of his family. And Caya Wu was closer to me than a wife. Peter Larkin killed her, even though it was my hand that drove the knife. He created the need for it. Caya Wu was my slave but once she belonged to me, thereafter it was I who belonged to her. When Peter Larkin came, an evil force, into my garden, he caused me to lose face. In my own estimation I shrunk to dwarf size. He had caused Caya Wu to violate my confidence; so I killed her. But she is still living. Wherever I go, she is near. She invades my thoughts. She causes all other women to be ugly in my eyes. Sometimes in the hush of the night she speaks to me and her voice is flower soft. When I called at the office of Peter Larkin he was almost in complete collapse. He gazed at me, speechless, his eyes glazed. I did not raise my voice. In a quiet tone I told him that he would not live throughout the year, that I was planning a torturous death for him that would make men's flesh creep merely to read about it. To emphasize my statements I left with him an elegantly bound copy of 'Torture Garden.' Thereafter I met him frequently. I was seldom far away. When he ate at various restaurants, invariably I would be at an adjoining table. Once at 'The Lyceum Theater' on an opening night I sat directly in front of him. On another occasion he flew to Washington and I was a passenger on the same plane. Always I was courteous to him. I bowed formally, and smiled, but he seldom acknowledged my greeting. His mind was in tumult. He could not sleep, and looked it. Once while he was driving back from Philadelphia, his car sideswiped a farm truck and he missed death by a fraction. He attributed the accident to me, even though I was in a car fully a quarter mile behind him. Actually I never once raised my hand against him. I knew his own nerves would solve the problem for me. I understand that he always slept in a room with the lights turned on, nor were they extinguished till morning came. He must have imagined that I was some fabulous monster who could assemble out of the very air. It was pleasant to watch his gradual disintegration. Nothing is more stimulating than the sight of an enemy gradually cracking up. Finally the nerves of Peter Larkin snapped and he committed suicide. He believed there was no escape, that he was helpless against my power. He believed I had numerous hidden alliances, that my schemes spread out like an octopus to cover the country. A fantastic delusion. Can I be censured for believing that his death was in the sweet nature of a blessing?"

"So it *was* murder after all," mused Kerle Andrews.

"It was suicide. The police have spoken," said Chan Kien. "In only one detail were they wrong. It was not a bullet that killed Peter Larkin, rather it was a woman's kiss, the caressing soft pressure of the lips of Caya Wu."

Herbert West: Reanimator

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Here's the fourth episode in this spine-refrigerating series—in which a young scientist fights a duel to the death . . . with Death!

IV. The Scream of the Dead

THE scream of a dead man gave to me that acute and added horror of Dr. Herbert West which harassed the latter years of our companionship. It is natural that such a thing as a dead man's scream should give horror, for it's obviously not a pleasing or ordinary occurrence; but I was used to similar experiences, hence suffered on this occasion only because of a particular circum-

stance. And, as I have implied, it was not of the dead man himself that I became afraid.

Herbert West, whose associate and assistant I was, possessed scientific interests far beyond the usual routine of a village physician. That was why, when establishing his practice in Bolton, he had chosen an isolated house near the potter's field. Briefly and brutally stated, West's sole absorbing interest was a secret study of the phenomena of life and its cessation, leading toward the reanimation of the dead through injection of an excitant solution. For this ghastly experimenting it was necessary to have a constant supply of very fresh human bodies; very fresh because even the least decay hopelessly damaged the brain structure, and human because we found that the solution had to be compounded differently for different types of organisms. Scores of rabbits and guinea-pigs had been killed and treated, but their trail was a blind one. West had never fully succeeded because he had never been able to secure a corpse sufficiently fresh. What he wanted were bodies from which vitality had only just departed; bodies with every cell intact and capable of receiving again the impulse toward that mode of motion called life. There was hope that this second and artificial life might be made perpetual by repetitions of the injection, but we had learned that an ordinary natural life would not respond to the action. To establish the artificial motion, natural life must be extinct—the specimens must be very fresh, but genuinely dead.

The awesome quest had begun when West and I were students at the Miskatonic University Medical School in Arkham, vividly conscious for the first time of the thoroughly mechanical nature of life. That was seven years before, but West looked scarcely a day older now—he was small, blond, clean-shaven, soft-voiced, and spectacled, with only an occasional flash of a cold blue eye to tell of the hardening and growing fanaticism of his character under the pressure of his terrible investigations. Our experiences had often been hideous in the extreme; the results of defective reanimation, when lumps of graveyard clay had been galvanized into morbid, unnatural, and brainless motion by various modifications of the vital solution.

ONE thing had uttered a nerve-shattering scream; another had risen violently, beaten us both to unconsciousness, and run amuck in a shocking way before it could be placed behind asylum bars; still another, a loathsome African monstrosity, had clawed out of its shallow grave and done a deed—West had had to shoot that object. We could not get bodies fresh enough to show any trace of reason when reanimated, so had perforce created nameless horrors. It was disturbing to think that one, perhaps two, of our monsters still lived—that thought haunted us shadowingly, till finally West disappeared under frightful circumstances. But at the time of the scream in the cellar laboratory of the isolated Bolton cottage, our fears were subordinate to our anxiety for extremely fresh specimens. West was more avid than I, so that it almost seemed to me that he looked half-covetously at any very healthy living physique.

It was in July, 1910, that the bad luck regarding specimens began to turn. I had been on a long visit to my parents in Illinois, and upon my return found West in a state of singular elation. He had, he told me excitedly, in all likelihood solved the problem of freshness through an approach from an entirely new angle—that of artificial preservation. I had known that he was working on a new and highly unusual embalming compound, and was not surprised that it had turned out well; but until he explained the details I was

rather puzzled as to how such a compound could help in our work, since the objectionable staleness of the specimens was largely due to delay occurring before we secured them. This, I now saw, West had clearly recognized; creating his embalming compound for future rather than immediate use, and trusting to fate to supply again some very recent and unburied corpse, as it had years before when we obtained the Negro killed in the Bolton prize-fight. At last fate had been kind, so that on this occasion there lay in the secret cellar laboratory a corpse whose decay could not by any possibility have begun. What would happen on reanimation, and whether we could hope for a revival of mind and reason, West did not venture to predict. The experiment would be a landmark in our studies, and he had saved the new body for my return, so that both might share the spectacle in accustomed fashion.

West told me how he had obtained the specimen. It had been a vigorous man; a well-dressed stranger just off the train and on his way to transact some business with the Bolton Worsted Mills. The walk through the town had been long, and by the time the traveler paused at our cottage to ask the way to the factories his heart had become greatly overtaxed. He had refused a stimulant, and had suddenly dropped dead only a moment later. The body, as might be expected, seemed to West a heaven-sent gift. In his brief conversation the stranger had made it clear that he was unknown in Bolton, and a search of his pockets subsequently revealed him to be one Robert Leavitt of St. Louis, apparently without a family to make instant inquiries about his disappearance. If this man could not be restored to life, no one would know of our experiment. We buried our materials in a dense strip of woods between the house and the potter's field. If, on the other hand, he could be restored, our fame would be brilliantly and perpetually established. So without delay West had injected into the body's wrist the compound which would hold it fresh for use after my arrival. The matter of the presumably weak heart, which to my mind imperilled the success of our experiment, did not appear to trouble West extensively. He hoped at last to obtain what he had never obtained before—a rekindled spark of reason and perhaps a normal, living creature.

So on the night of July 18, 1910, Herbert West and I stood in the cellar laboratory and gazed at a white, silent figure beneath the dazzling arc-light. The embalming compound had worked uncannily well, for as I stared fascinatedly at the sturdy frame which had lain two weeks without stiffening I was moved to seek West's assurance that the thing was really dead. This assurance he gave readily enough; reminding me that the reanimating solution was never used without careful tests as to life; since it could have no effect if any of the original vitality were present. As West proceeded to take preliminary steps, I was impressed by the vast intricacy of the new experiment; an intricacy so vast that he could trust no hand less delicate than his own. Forbidding me to touch the body, he first injected a drug in the wrist just beside the place his needle had punctured when injecting the embalming compound. This, he said, was to neutralize the compound and release the system to a normal relaxation so that the reanimating solution might freely work when injected. Slightly later, when a change and a gentle tremor seemed to affect the dead limbs, West stuffed a pillow-like object violently over the twitching face, not withdrawing it until the corpse appeared quiet and ready for our attempt at reanimation. The pale enthusiast now applied some last perfunctory tests for absolute lifelessness, withdrew

satisfied, and finally injected into the left arm an accurately measured amount of the vital elixir, prepared during the afternoon with a greater care than we had used since college days, when our feats were new and groping. I cannot express the wild, breathless suspense with which we waited for results on this first really fresh specimen—the first we could reasonably expect to open its lips in rational speech, perhaps to tell of what it had seen beyond the unfathomable abyss.

WEST was a materialist, believing in no soul and attributing all the workings of consciousness to bodily phenomena; consequently he looked for no revelation of hideous secrets from gulfs and caverns beyond death's barrier. I did not wholly disagree with him theoretically, yet held vague instinctive remnants of the primitive faith of my forefathers; so that I could not help eyeing the corpse with a certain amount of awe and terrible expectation. Besides—I could not extract from my memory that hideous, inhuman shriek we heard on the night we tried our first experiment in the deserted farmhouse at Arkham.

Very little time had elapsed before I saw that the attempt was not to be a total failure. A touch of color came to cheeks hitherto chalk-white, and spread out under the curiously ample stubble of sandy beard. West, who had his hand on the pulse of the left wrist, suddenly nodded significantly; and almost simultaneously a mist appeared on the mirror inclined above the body's mouth. There followed a few spasmodic muscular motions, and then an audible breathing and visible motion of the chest. I looked at the closed eyelids, and thought I detected a quivering. Then the lids opened, showing eyes which were gray, calm, and alive, but still unintelligent and not even curious.

In a moment of fantastic whim I whispered questions to the reddening ears; questions of other worlds of which the memory might still be present. Subsequent terror drove them from my mind, but I think the last one, which I repeated, was: "Where have you been?" I do not yet know whether I was answered or not, for no sound came from the well-shaped mouth; but I do know that at that moment I firmly thought the thin lips moved silently, forming syllables which I would have vocalized as "only now" if that phrase had possessed any sense or relevancy. At that moment, as I say, I was elated with the conviction that the one great goal had been attained; and that for the first time a reanimated corpse had uttered distinct words impelled by actual reason. In the next moment there was no doubt about the triumph; no doubt that the solution had truly accomplished, at least temporarily, its full mission of restoring rational and articulate life to the dead. But in that triumph there came to me the greatest of all horrors—not horror of the thing that spoke, but of the deed that I had witnessed and of the man with whom my professional fortunes were joined.

For that very fresh body, at last writhing into full and terrifying consciousness with eyes dilated at the memory of its last scene on earth, threw out its frantic hands in a life and death struggle with the air; and suddenly collapsing into a second and final dissolution from which there could be no return, screamed out the cry that will ring eternally in my aching brain:

"Help! Keep off, you cursed little towhead fiend—keep that damned needle away from me!"

The Possessed

By ALICE-MARY SCHNIRRING

LLOYD JONES swung briskly off the train as it wheezed to a stop. The station platform was somnolent in the hot August sun; not a porter, not a ticket-taker was to be seen, even asleep—as, from his previous visits to Colville, he had confidently anticipated. Every year for the past five Lloyd had been spending his two weeks' vacation in the same little town; it was quiet—almost moribund—but it relaxed him, and his Welsh ancestry kept him high-strung enough so that he welcomed his annual coma, as he called it.

He was rather surprised not to find Joe, the station-master, inside the little wooden station that perched totteringly beside the platform; but concluded that he had probably stepped "down street" for a quick one, to counteract the heavy heat. The Anderson house, where Lloyd always boarded, was only a matter of a half-mile from the station; so he hefted his suitcase and started down the dusty white road.

The heat *was* stifling. No wonder, thought Lloyd, as he passed a handkerchief (already grubby from the stifling train ride) over his dripping forehead, that all the villagers seemed to have chosen to remain indoors. As he trudged along, it was almost unendurable to focus his eyes on the familiar landmarks that he passed. Waves of heat shimmered up from the ground and the dust-powdered grass, distorting and subtly veiling the trees and houses. The effect, he decided, was unpleasant. At moments, he could almost believe that this road which he had traveled so many times before led to some place he had never seen, and would do better to avoid.

When the Anderson house came into sight, as he rounded the last curve, the impression persisted. His memory of it was of a small, rather shabby frame cottage, with a good bit of shrubbery doing its best to soften the rather uncompromising rectangular lines that a small-town architect had grimly planned. Today, somehow, the house looked as if it were—well, crouching; Lloyd felt oddly as if it were trying to hide behind the trees and bushes.

His relief at being almost there spurred him along the last remaining yards; and by the time he had tossed his suitcase onto the porch, he had regained his spirits.

"Hi!" he called. "Mrs. Anderson! Here I am again!"

There was no answer. He rattled the door-knob, and found that the door was locked. Then, for the first time he looked around. The house showed almost unnoticeable signs of neglect, such as a loose board in the porch (he remembered Mr. Anderson as a putterer, who would have had the board nailed securely within five minutes of noticing it); yet it had the unmistakable look of being lived-in. For example, one of the upstairs windows was open, and a curtain was fluttering in it—a rather dirty curtain, to be sure; but not with the dirt of complete neglect that an abandoned house would show. While his eye was still taking in all these minutiae, but before his mind had formed any analysis of their meaning, the door was opened. For a second Lloyd could not quite place

the tall, dark-haired boy; then he shifted his position to ease his leg, and Lloyd recognized him as the Anderson's nephew; a quiet, intelligent, and likable lad—far more likable than the Anderson's own boy, Charley.

"Hello, Henry!" said Lloyd, with real pleasure. "Where is everybody? Did you all forget that the bad penny turns up every August fifteenth?"

It seemed to Lloyd that Henry looked startled, with a peculiar undercurrent of a feeling that defied analysis.

"Why—Mr. Jones," said Henry, slowly. "You haven't—no, of course, you haven't heard. Aunt Martha and Uncle Joe—" he stopped, and bit his lip, his mouth twisting almost as if he were going to cry.

"Not—dead?" said Lloyd, unbelievingly. Henry shook his head.

"No, but—worse, in a way," he muttered, looking at the circles his own toe was describing painstakingly on the weather-beaten boards. "They're both in Restways."

For a minute Lloyd was too aghast to speak. Restways, as he knew well, was an insane asylum about five miles the other side of Colville. Suddenly he thought of Charley, their boy: was it an hereditary taint, and, if so, should the two youngsters be living all alone here, in this deserted place?

"What about Charley?" he finally asked, his voice sounding hoarse from shock. "Are you two living here all alone?"

"Charley"—and now, for a second, Henry looked fleetingly at him. There was a tiny pause before he went on, and something—a flash—that Lloyd could not an-

What macabre horror haunted this place . . . a horror that caused the townspeople to double-bar their doors at dusk?

alyze looked at him out of Henry's eyes. He looked down again, and it was gone. "Charley—disappeared, one night last spring. Nobody ever knew where he went, or why; and it was that night that Aunt Martha and Uncle Joe went—went—" his voice faltered, and stopped.

THE whole thing had a macabre, nightmare quality to Lloyd. A mysterious disappearance, two cases of insanity following right on its heels, and this fifteen-year-old boy alone in an empty house; untended, uncared-for? What were the villagers thinking about, that none of them had taken the boy into one of their homes? His lips tightened, and, decisively, he picked up his bag with one hand, and took Henry's arm in firm, reassuring grasp with the other. "Come on," he said. "We're going inside and talk this over."

It seemed to him that Henry's steps dragged a little; that there was some reluctance in him to enter the house; but he came uncomplainingly. The house, to Lloyd's keen nostrils, had a musty smell—natural enough, with only an adolescent to do the housekeeping (or ignore it); but beneath that was another, almost indefinable odor, that was extremely repugnant. It was—he sniffed—yes! a fishy smell. Fishy in every sense, his Welsh instinct told him; without, however, telling him just why. He only knew that he felt uneasy.

He turned left, into the little parlor, and put down his suitcase. The fishy smell was not so apparent, once out of the front hall; and he threw open a window to air out the room completely. Then, drawing Henry down on the couch beside him, he elicited the boy's story.

Boiled down, the essence of it was just about what Henry had said: one evening Charley Anderson had been in the house—had, in fact, gone to bed—and the next morning, when Henry had come downstairs to breakfast, he had found his aunt and uncle in Charley's bedroom, but no Charley. His bed was empty, and the covers wrenched off it: some of them even torn. The Andersons (and the words, as he haltingly told Lloyd about this, seemed to be dragged out of the boy by some terrible, hysterical inner compulsion) were crouched in the far corner of the big, airy room. The window was wide open, and a driving Spring rain was blowing in, soaking them both to the skin (they were in their night clothes); but they were oblivious to it. Uncle Joe's face was buried in his hands, as if to shut out some sight too appalling to bear: ever since, his attendants has been unable to draw his hands away from his eyes for longer than a couple of seconds. Aunt Martha was shivering uncontrollably; at first, Henry said, the neighbors whom he had run to fetch thought that it was from the drenching rain; but that was nine weeks ago, and she still shivered. Sometimes she screamed.

Lloyd felt a sick horror as the boy's story slowly, sometimes word by word, drew to its close. He kept his eyes on Henry's face while he spoke; and, slowly a feeling grew in him that Henry was deliberately withholding something from him. It could, of course, be only that the shock he had sustained—and Lloyd remembered that he was a sensitive, artistic boy—was so great that his mind simply refused to bring certain aspects of that shock to light; but, underneath that, Lloyd sensed a deeper withdrawal, and something else—something that he was unable to put a name to.

Not until later that night did illumination suddenly come to him. He had insisted on taking Henry for a short walk to the village, in the dusk, when the heat was not quite so stifling, in order to buy a few provisions. They had seen few people, and those that they did see seemed in a hurry to get indoors. A couple of them whom Lloyd remembered from previous

summers spoke to them, pleasantly enough, but with an abstraction that was entirely foreign to the easy-going, inquisitive, friendly Colville folk. At five-thirty, the grocer, Mr. Simms, was preparing to close his shop; and usually in summer the shop —which was the equivalent of the local forum, where the village wits and political sages foregathered until late in the evening —stayed open until nine or nine-thirty every night.

Tonight there were only two other people in Simms', and they showed no intention of lingering.

Simms' rubicund face showed new lines and looked oddly grayish in the late afternoon light. His greeting to Lloyd was friendly, but he showed none of his usual disposition to engage him in lengthy, rambling conversation; in fact, he served him with remarkable alacrity, and almost shoved the two of them toward the door when the order was tucked away in big brown paper bags; following them out and locking the door. "Well, g'night, Lloyd," he said, over his shoulder. "Gotta get home quick, now—Mary gets worried if I'm not in well before dark."

Puzzling over this, Lloyd turned to Henry. A sudden realization came to him of how much he had matured since the summer before. Then, he had been a lanky, almost shy lad—except with four or five of his contemporaries, over whom he had seemed to exert a strong influence: Lloyd remembered, vaguely, that Henry had been the leader of some boys' club—now, as he strode along beside him, he seemed to have taken on a dignity and force that his limp in no measure impaired. It was apparent that he was quite capable of taking care of himself, even in the empty Anderson house, with its dreadful associations. But it suddenly came to Lloyd—he should not be *that* self-reliant. It was abnormal, not only for a boy his age, no matter how much older he might seem, but for any human being who had been through such an experience.

That was when the light first began to come to him.

While he was tempted to bring the matter to a showdown as quickly as possible, his instinct warned him against forcing the issue; but, by means of one or two subtle questions, he strengthened his own feeling that Henry knew, very well, what was at the back of the whole thing, and in that Lloyd included the changed atmosphere of the village.

Now, Lloyd was anxious to delay, even by a little, their return to the Anderson house; while Henry seemed to be quickening his slightly halting stride. A conviction grew in the older man that the roots of this ugly plant lay in the house. As the shadows lengthened, the boy's manner changed, too; his profile at times looked almost hawk-like.

"Hold up a minute, Henry," Lloyd said abruptly. "There's a stone in my shoe."

Henry tossed his head back impatiently, as if about to say something, but tightened his lips and waited, though with a rather poor grace.

Lloyd sat down by the roadside, and shook an imaginary pebble from his left shoe. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye he saw something which shocked him.

THE town behind him seemed to have taken on an unfamiliar aspect. When he looked straight down the road there it was, just as they had left it some twenty minutes before; but on either side of the road there appeared to be oddly-shaped buildings and a landscape entirely foreign both to him and the contour of the country. When he looked sharply at either side of the road, however, the placid fields and trees, with here and there a farmhouse, were as they had been; but on the edge of his range of vision, where the town itself should be, seemed to be strange towers

and battlemented walls. It was as if a picture had been projected, superimposed upon an already existing landscape. And Lloyd knew, deep within himself, that this was not only a trick of the light.

Now he was in a hurry to get back to the house, even with this companion. For by now there was no question but that his companion was an entirely different personality from the boy whose shoe had traced nervous circles on the weather-beaten porch floor, only a few hours earlier.

They covered the remaining half-mile to the cottage in silence. When they arrived Lloyd took the food to the kitchen, made sandwiches, and brought them back to the living-room, only to find that Henry had disappeared. He went into the hall, intending to see if he were in his room when, inexplicably, he seemed to hear the tramp of mailed feet (the phrase sprang unbidden into his mind) outside the door, and low voices. For a moment panic had him in its grip; then, mastering it, he went to the door and threw it open.

He almost laughed in his relief and self-ridicule when he saw the four boys standing there. They looked familiar to him, and in a moment he placed them as the members of the club which Henry had formed, although their names, except for one, eluded him.

"Joe Domenico, isn't it?" he smiled. I know the rest of you, too, but I don't remember your names. Wait a minute—you're the Daniels boy—Billy, that's it. Looking for Henry? I think he's in his room. Wait, I'll call him for you."

With a sense of surprise he heard himself almost babbling. The contrast of these four normal, healthy youngsters with his own dark imaginings had, he thought wryly, affected him so that he sounded like the village idiot. He stepped back in the doorway, saying, "Come on in," as the Domenico boy said, gravely and courteously, "Good evening. Thank you, we go up. We are expected."

The four of them, with no other greeting, filed past him and up the stairs, disappearing from his view at the landing where they turned left. All his forebodings flooded back as he watched them. They, too, looked much older than he remembered them—and surely more serious, even stern, than was natural for boys of their age?

HE WAITED for half an hour; then, as quietly as possible, ascended the stairs. Henry's room was on the top floor, he recalled; a little attic room. Even with the whole house to choose from, it was apparent he was still there, because voices issued from behind its closed door, and light poured from the cracks. Almost holding his breath, Lloyd crept along the hall until he was right outside the door. He could hear, now, as plainly as if he were in the room; but the voices sounded almost like those of strangers; even Henry's voice, which retained only enough of its ordinary timbre to be recognizable. It was Henry who was speaking.

"—from you, Andrus. But Thorvia must be governed, and Fiero is the logical lord. Remember, it bounds Maglar all along the northeastern border. Moreover, we all trust Fiero not to misuse his greater strength, do we not?"

There was a chorus of "Aye," that nevertheless sounded dissatisfied; from which one voice emerged. Lloyd thought it was probably the Domenico boy, from the slight accent.

"We trusta Fiero, Kirwan, but we like-a him, too. Thorvia is no place for one whom you like."

Henry's voice sounded almost angry. "I tell you, Horvath—and you, Andrus, Fiero and Shira—as I have told you before: Thorvia is no more dangerous than any other part of Draconia. This—the danger

isn't localized." Half under his breath, he added, grimly, "I wish it were."

There was a moment's silence, then a new voice spoke up. "Kirwan, I crave leave to speak."

"Speak, then, Fiero." Henry—or Kirwan—had a note of resignation in his voice.

"I have only one question, Kirwan, but one that we all want answered. Can you eliminate the danger—or even control it?"

This time there was a long pause before Kirwan replied. When he did, it was in a low voice, almost a whisper.

"I don't know. I tried inking out the swamp" (Lloyd frowned in puzzlement; it didn't seem to make sense) "but—the next day the smell was there, stronger than ever. Although nothing has happened since, I am afraid—" He fell silent.

"You are afraid," said Horvath's voice, slowly. "That the danger still exists."

"Yes."

With sudden decision Lloyd opened the door and stepped into the room. For a fleeting second he had an impression of five men seated around a council table, with a large map spread open upon it; and a glimpse of dark-vaulted ceilings and echoing stone corridors. Then it was gone, and all that remained was five angry and startled boys, and a map spread out on the table. In a split second Henry had seized the map and rolled it up and risen to his feet.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, in a cold, furious voice. Lloyd looked steadily at him.

"I don't know what you have been up to, but I gathered that you are in very great need of help," he said, equally coldly. "You had better tell me what the danger is. I am right in thinking that this will explain what happened to the Andersons, I imagine?"

Kirwan returned his look. When he finally spoke there was a white, drawn look around his mouth. "Yes," he said briefly. "Sit down."

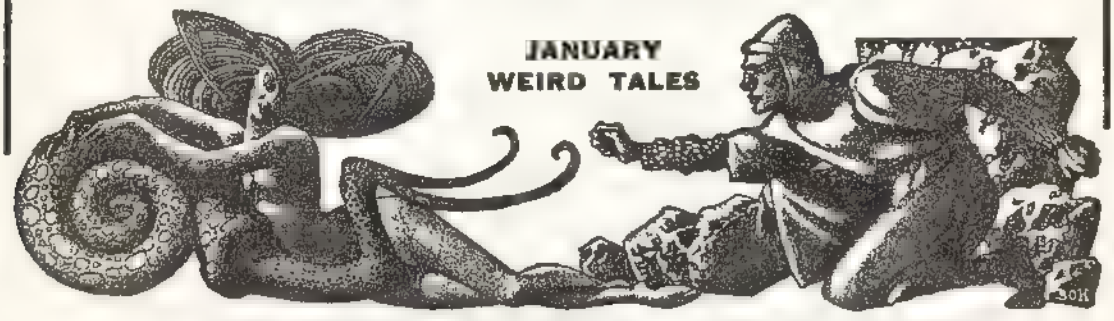
He put the map on the table, but before unrolling it looked in turn at each of the others. He seemed to question them, silently; and each one slowly inclined his head. Not until the last one had responded, was the map unrolled.

Only a half-hour later Lloyd knew all

For months the flyer had laughed in the face of danger . . . now in forgotten, forbidden China he found himself afraid

QUEST OF A NOBLE TIGER

by Frank Owen



that there was to be known. He knew why Charley Anderson had disappeared, and why his parents were in an asylum. He knew, too, why the townspeople were at home behind barred doors when dusk fell; and he knew that it was not a trick of his vision that had shown him towers and battlements hazily superimposed upon little Colville that afternoon.

And he knew what the unpleasant odor in the hallway was.

Although he felt sick he spoke quietly in a controlled voice. "There's only one thing to do. You will have to burn the map."

He was looking at dark Horvath (no longer did he even think of them by the names they had been christened), who had impressed him as being the most level-headed of them all, including Kirwan; and Horvath stirred, with a heavy sigh, and said, "Yes. I think that, too." The others started to nod in agreement, when they were brought up short by Kirwan's voice.

"No!" he said. He was standing, leaning on one hand that pinned the map to the table.

"No!" he said again, his voice hoarse and rasping. "You can't! It's—it's not just a map; it's more than that. You can't destroy it! It would be like—destroying *us.*" Behind the intensity of his look was something else. Could it be fear?

"I know," Lloyd answered him quietly. "But that's why it must be done. This is—out of hand, Kirwan. You can't control it now. Do you think I noticed nothing this afternoon? In the village? And right now—" he broke off long enough to go to the door and open it. The fetid, fishy smell was stronger than before.

"Close the door!" Kirwan commanded him fiercely. Lloyd complied, but turned, facing him, to say, "You see? How long do you think it will be before *that* turns on *you?*"

The sensitive face across the table was twisted and dead white. Finally, in a toneless voice, he spoke. "All right. Do it now, if it must be done; quickly."

Lloyd held out his hand for the map, which Andrus passed to him; reached into his pocket for matches; struck one, and lit the corner of the map. Kirwan sank into his chair, shaking from head to foot in long, nervous tremors, and buried his face in his hands.

The map curled and shriveled, as the flame, colorless in the glare of the light, silently gnawed its black, consuming path over the delicate draughtsmanship. It burned rapidly, giving off great puffs of dark smoke; in the smoke Lloyd had the illusion that he could see the ghosts of strange flowers and animals, the flash of a red cloak here, a glint of armor there; stone towers, marching ranks of men—all swirling faster and faster, around and around in a smoky spiral—and suddenly, the last bit of black ash fell to the floor, consumed, and it was all gone.

For a moment longer, they were all immobile; then Lloyd slowly went to the door and opened it. Fresh, sweet air flowed in from the stair-well. He turned to the five boys, smiling.

"Well, Henry—that does it," he said. Almost as one, the other four drew deep, trembling breaths; but Henry, his head pillowed on his arms, did not stir.

"Look, boy—don't take it so hard," said Lloyd. He went over, awkwardly putting a consolatory hand on his shoulder; then, suddenly, he stiffened. "Henry!" he said sharply. The four boys drew closer; irrelevantly, he noticed how young and coltish they looked.

He tilted back the quiet head, which offered no resistance. Henry's face, too, looked very young again, and very peaceful with its closed eyes. The little breeze from the open door blew ashes across the floor.

The victim of some horrible form of witchcraft can fight back . . . but only with more witchcraft.

"The air seems full of flowers — flowers everywhere."

The Evil Doll

By HANNES BOK

THE artist laid aside his palette and tossed down his brush. He ran slender fingers nervously through his thick black hair. "It's no use," he said. "I can't go on. I feel another attack coming on already." He looked for sympathy across the untidy floor of his studio to the girl on the model stand. "If only you could help me a little more, Eileen—if only you had some faith in me."

"Can I drop the pose?" The girl was pretty in her inexpensive clothes. The artist nodded, and she relaxed.

The artist turned, and waved his hand at the walls, crammed with darkly painted canvases. He was tall and very thin; his shabby suit draped from his shoulders in mournful folds. His gaunt face was dark and bitter. "If only you had more faith in these, Eileen—faith, too, in me—" He sighed, and pulled up a battered kitchen chair whose legs were wired into place.

The girl was not much stirred by his bleakness. "I can't help how I feel about you any longer, Maksim. I've done everything I can to help you. I'd lend you more

money, but I haven't enough to take care of myself as it is. Surely there's something you can do—"

He snorted a bitter laugh. "Do? I've tried everything. I know that my work is good. These art dealers—bourgeois pigs!—how can they understand what I am trying to express? They look at my work—pictures that I have slaved over, sweat blood in the making—and they say, 'Yes, it is good, but will the public understand it?'" His voice squeaked in mimicry. "The public! How can it understand what it has never been given the chance to understand?"

Eileen arose and stepped off the model stand. "But surely, Maksim, you could go out and get a job for yourself. Then you could save money until you had enough to live on for a while—"

He looked up at her, laughing darkly. "I do not know why I talk to you like this. I go out and get work! First of all, I am an artist. My life is painting. Without painting, I should die. Then there is this heart of mine. Oh yes—I admit that it sounds like an excuse. But that is not true. My heart"—he touched it dramatically—"it is very bad. Yes. I should be dead now, dead and in my grave. But I live on as best I can, because life to me is very sweet as long as I am strong enough to hold a brush. The doctors have told me not even to paint, that the excitement is too great. But I must. It is my blood. I care for nothing else." His eyes were regarding his dim canvases as though they were golden treasures.

Eileen took her coat from the back of a chair and slipped it on. "I used to believe you once, Maksim, when I thought that I was in love with you. You were so charming! But now I'm not so sure. I don't believe that you really have heart attacks. And whether you do or not, I can't continue to give you money that I need for myself."

He arose, smiling forlornly. "You are selfish!"

She shook her head. "Not selfish, Maksim. I just can't get along on the little that I earn. Rent's high, and food's expensive, and I need decent clothes around the office. Surely you can understand that."

He shrugged. "You sound so—final. It's in my mind that you are leaving, never to come back. That you are sick of me and my weaknesses." He waved a hand hopelessly. "And so our little friendship is ended. Too bad." The girl did not reply, but put on her hat and slid her fingers into her gloves. She tucked her purse under an arm, and the artist's eyes clung greedily to it. "But first, dear Eileen, before you go—let me have a little souvenir."

She discerned where his eyes were fixed. "More money, I suppose."

"Oh, no. Not money. No, I should like to make a little doll like you—something to put away for the present and to take out in the years to come when I remember you."

She laid down her purse. "Will it take long?"

"Oh, no! Merely a few minutes. Please."

"Well, then," she said, removing her gloves and hat.

MAKSIM BOGROW stumbled about the dark little room in a hurry. He brought out a battered cigar box from a lop-sided cupboard, and a candle. "Will you light this for me? Thank you!" He seated himself before the candle's glow and opened the cigar box, taking out a lump of dull white substance. Eileen pulled up a chair and sat down.

"What's that?"

"Wax," he said, holding the lump beside the candle's flame and revolving it steadily as though barbecuing it. As it

softened he kneaded it with his fingers. "See, we push into it here, and roll it out—so . . . And now we pull here, and roll some more—and what do we have? A body. Your body."

"It doesn't look like me," Eileen said. "Should I pose on the stand?"

HE SHOOK his head. His smouldering eyes had become unpleasant. "It is not required. But wait—if you were to give me a little lock of your hair to put on my little doll's head—" He unhooked a pair of scissors from a nail on the wall and held them out suggestively.

Eileen shook her head disparagingly as she found a wisp of hair which would not be missed. The scissors snapped. "Here you are—but I haven't the faintest idea of what you think you're doing."

"You'll see soon enough," he promised. He held up the little wax figure. "Kiss this."

Her eyes widened. "Kiss it? Why?"

"Because to me it will ever after seem that you have left in this wax a little of your personality—something of yourself."

She kissed the wax. "Sentimental idiot!" He thanked her gravely.

"And now—if only there were a bit of your finger nail—"

"Oh, Maksim, this is silly!" She did not accept the scissors.

"You think so? You laugh at me because I am sentimental to you, no? But you will see." He thrust the scissors out again. She hesitated, then sighed and humored him by trimming one of her nails. "There," she sighed. "I hope you won't want anything else—my teeth, for instance."

"Oh, no," he said blandly. "This is quite enough." He warmed the little puppet's head at the flame, then pressed the hair into place. With a fine brush, he touched his palette, then sketched eyes and a mouth on the doll. "There, you see it? A little Eileen."

She studied the tiny figure. "You know, it does resemble me—the lines are like mine—"

"It is you, my dear. Or almost—one little thing, and the charm is complete. It must be baptized in your name."

She was amused. "You sound almost as if you were a witch."

"Oh, I am a witch," he said jokingly. "What else is a sick man like me to do when there is no money coming to him except what he can borrow?" But his eyes were narrowed. Eileen's lips tightened and she stirred uneasily.

"Witchcraft—that's all superstitution!" she said.

"Yes, isn't it? I have not made you fear me?" There was a knock on the door, and his face darkened. "Excuse me."

Eileen arose. "I must be going."

"A moment longer, I beseech you." He waved her down and stalked over to the door. When he opened it, he went rigid with surprise, as though confronted by a ghastly apparition. He went out into the hall, closing the door. Eileen curiously examined the little wax figure. At first she heard only a blurred mumbling from the hall; then the voices grew louder, Maksim Bogrow's with anger, and the words were distinct. "What do you mean by coming here at this time, when I told you that I would have a visitor?"

A woman's voice countered shrilly. "I don't care! You can't treat me like this, Maksim. I'm not your slave; I love you! Either give me back the money I've loaned you, or marry me as you promised." Eileen's lips twisted in disgust: she shook her head.

Maksim Bogrow's voice was threateningly gruff. "Leta—I have the little doll which I made of you. It has been carefully stored away—oh, so very carefully. Do you wish it that I take this little doll

out of its wrappings and—" Eileen scanned the little figure which was herself, and pondered.

"Oh, Maksim, no! But take pity on me, Maksim. I love you—I can't help loving you even though I know you're no good. It's all your fault. I didn't want you and you kept making me come to you—and now I'm no longer able to control myself—"

"You'll get out of here and never come back, my sweet little Leta—or you will wish that you had. Yes—when you feel the pains again—"

Eileen frowned at the closed door. What did he mean? She arose and paced to and fro.

The woman was weeping. "Oh, no, Maksim—please! That girl in there—I saw her go in; I was waiting—do you really love her? Or are you going to do to her what you've done to me?"

Maksim muttered an answer, but Eileen could not understand it. The woman cried sullenly, "Oh, all right, I'll go. I hate you—I hate you even though I love you!"

There was a sound of feet descending the stair, and the artist entered, shutting the door. "My landlady was here, asking for the rent," he said. "You see how in need of money I am?" He was nervous, and his face was darkly flushed.

"Was that really your landlady?" she asked coldly.

He stared indignantly. "You think I lie!" He brushed a hand petulantly over his hair. "You will not lend me money? Well, no matter. I have this doll." He took it from the table.

She reached for it, and he jerked his hand away. "Maksim, I feel uncomfortable, leaving this doll with you. I heard what that woman said out there, and there's no need for you to have this doll to add to your trophies."

He stepped back. Her hand was still out, waiting. "Or perhaps you're superstitious?" he asked.

She tossed her head. "I? Keep your doll then—and I hope it makes you very happy. I'm leaving now, Maksim. I am angry with you, and I don't think I'll ever come back—"

He smiled unpleasantly. "Oh, you will—of that I'm certain."

She laughed. "You're so sure about it, aren't you? I don't see how I was ever fool enough to have believed in you." She snatched up her hat, gloves and purse, hurried to the door, opened it, and looked over her shoulder. "Good-by, Maksim—and I mean good-by."

HE WAS still smiling. He bent over the candle and blew out its flame. The girl shrugged irritably and stepped out. As she hurried down the dim stair, there was a slight movement in the shadows below, and a woman climbed into sight. She was haggardly pretty in a florid, big-boned way, and her clothes were expensive remnants, long out of style. Eileen stopped.

The woman smiled wryly. "So you're the one!" she sneered, her eyes inventorying the girl. "You think you're in love with him, don't you—the same as I did!" The blackening had run from her eyelashes as though she had been crying.

"No," Eileen said. "I don't love him."

The woman stood aside. "Oh, go down," she said in discouragement. "There's no use in talking to you. I wouldn't have listened if anyone had tried to tell me what he was like. That's what you're like when you're in love." Eileen started down past her, then stopped irresolutely. The woman asked. Tell me—did he make a little image of you yet?" Eileen nodded.

The woman seemed to turn pale. "Then you'd better go right back up to him, and get it from him. Destroy it—do you

understand? As long as he has it you'll never be free of him. He's a witch—do you hear me, a witch!" Her voice lifted shrilly. "He used a doll to make me do whatever he asked—I had to give him all my money, lie for him, steal for him! I love him—I don't care. But you—" She pointed vehemently. "Go back to him and get that doll. It's for your own good!"

"You mean—backmail?" Eileen asked.

"No, witchcraft. That man's a witch."

"But that's preposterous. There's no such thing as witchcraft, really. It's just superstition."

The woman smiled bitterly. "You think so? Hasn't it ever occured to you that there must be some truth in a belief which has persisted since history began? People don't hand down knowledge that's of no value. The gods and goddesses of the past centuries are forgotten, because there was no truth in them—but witchcraft persists—haven't you ever wondered why?"

She poked a finger of derision at her clothes. "If only I had believed in time, I'd not be wearing these. You go back to him and get that doll!" Eileen shook her head in helpless defiance and again started down the steps, but the woman clutched her arm. "You fool, can't you see that I want to save you? It doesn't matter about me—I love the man—I don't want him to have any power over you!"

Eileen stared at her; the woman was sincere. She pondered a moment, then reluctantly turned and proceeded toward Maksim Bogrow's studio. The woman followed a few steps, then huddled against the wall, staring upward after Eileen in dread. Eileen rapped softly on Bogrow's door.

"Who is it?" he shouted peevishly. "I'm busy. Go away!"

"Maksim, it's I—Eileen. Let me in!"

"Get away from that door!"

"Maksim, let me in!"

"Get away from that door, you little—" He employed an unpleasant name, and Eileen's jaw dropped in dismay. "Get away, or you'll be sorry!" Eileen rapped again. "All right, damn you—you're asking for it!" Eileen stepped back, expecting the door to shoot open and Bogrow to rush out in fury, but instead she heard the tramping of his feet and then the running of water. She heard him mumbling, "In the name of all that's holy—" She pressed her ear to the door. "—I baptize you *Eileen Williams!*"

Then suddenly a sharp pain wrenched through her head, and involuntarily she screamed, clapping her hands to her eyes. Through a tumult of anguish she heard Bogrow's laughter, raucous in its triumph. Then the pain faded away. Weak with relief, she sagged with exhaustion against the door.

"Eileen! You still there?" Bogrow asked. "That's a sample of what you'll get every time you displease me. Pleasant, wasn't it? Now go home. Go home—and next time you feel the pain, you'll know it's a summons from me, and then you'd better come—but quick!"

Eileen turned drooping from the door. The haggard woman was still on the steps. "Too late," she said. "I warned you, but it was too late." Her face was as white as though she too had suffered the pain. "I know how it was—that's what he did to me."

"Are you coming down?" Eileen asked wanly, starting downstairs.

"Me? No, I'll stay. I want to see him again. I'll try to get your doll if he'll let me in." Almost to herself she murmured, "He's so cruel—and I love him so. Don't you worry—if he'll let me in, I'll get that doll!"

They gazed at each other for a moment, and then Eileen went deliberately down the stairs.

Nothing happened for two weeks. At

work Eileen was nervous, her head jerking up from her work at the entry of every person into her department. One of the counter girls noticed it. "Eileen, what's the matter with you? You act like a scared rabbit!"

"Nothing. I just thought maybe it was someone I know."

"How's your boy friend—the one who dated you up here that time?"

"Him? I haven't seen him now for over a week."

The counter girl smiled wisely. "I know what's the matter with you—you're in love, and he's ditched you. I told you he was poison! I could tell it in every inch of him!"

THEN one night Eileen was waked by the dreadful pain. It jabbed her, departed, then returned, stabbed, and went. She sat bolt upright in bed, whipping her hands to her temples. The throbbing pain diminished and vanished. She left the bed unsteadily and went to the bathroom medicine chest for an aspirin. She returned to her bed and lay down. She was almost asleep when the pain returned, and suddenly realization dawned. She clutched her breast. "It's Maksim, calling me! Oh, God! He is a witch!"

She left the bed again and began to dress, then stopped. "No, I won't go," she said, as though someone were there to comfort her. "I'll die of it first—I won't go."

She turned on a light and sat down, picked up a magazine and tried to read it, but she was too nervous. For an hour the pain returned, and this time it did not diminish. She rocked back and forth in torment, perspiring with agony, a little moan slipping through her gritted teeth. Then she jumped up. *"I'll have to go to him!"* She tore her coat out of a closet, did not bother to get a hat, and hurried out, not pausing to lock the door. She could hardly see, and while waiting for the elevator she leaned against the wall as though her legs were melting. The elevator was delayed, and suddenly she raced down the steps and outside.

The pain did not stop. At last she was at Bogrow's studio, beating on the door.

He was in his dressing gown. He towered over her, his face slashed with a cold smile. "So you recognized my summons, and came. Well, my little dear, come in. I've been waiting for you."

She could only stand looking at him, her eyes glazed with agony. He smiled in satisfaction, then said, "Ah, but of course. The little image!" He went into the studio, took the doll from the table and carefully pulled a long pin from its head. The pain swept out of Eileen. Gasping, she lurched into the studio and dropped down on a chair. Bogrow held up the doll.

"You see? Your little counterpart."

Strength was returning to her. "Maksim, you're a devil!"

"Oh, yes, a devil," he said sardonically. "You were so much my friend—so kind to me once, and now I've become a devil!" She arose and started toward him. "No, keep away—or I might replace this pin."

"What do you want from me?"

"What do I want from you! Why, money, of course. Money so that I can go on creating these dreams of mine." His voice was reverent as he scanned his paintings.

"I haven't much in my purse, but you can have whatever's in it." She lifted her purse, and he advanced to take it. "So what that woman said—the one I met on the stair—is true!"

"Woman? Oh, yes." He smiled disdainfully. "Poor thing that she was—have you heard what became of her?" He rifled the purse and dropped it on her lap, then offered a newspaper from the table. "This headline—you see it? Probably you do not recognize the photograph. It must

have been taken years ago. 'Woman Dies in Plunge'." He read a few lines, his eyes flicking from the print to the girl's face. "Mrs. Leta Roberts, 31, estranged wife of Herbert A. Roberts, plunged to her death shortly after midnight from her tenth floor room in the Alvin Hotel, 357 West Twelfth Street. While entertaining a friend, she complained of severe pains—"

"It doesn't seem possible," Eileen said dully.

"No, it doesn't," he agreed heartily. "That is why the police do not bother me. The poor woman—she tried to steal your image from me under the pretense of making love. Unfortunately, she was of no further use to me, and I happened to have in reserve a little doll which I had made of her some time previously. She was in my way. So, rather than allow her to make further trouble, I disposed of her." He tapped the paper significantly. "Really, Eileen, this isn't very much money. I can't get along on this. You'll have to find me some more."

"But I haven't any money saved, and I won't get paid until Thursday!"

"Well, we'll wait until Thursday—and I'll give you a few little reminders once in a while, just in case you forget."

"You mean—?"

"Oh, I regret to say it, but—yes, I'll put pins in your doll every now and then to let you know that I'm thinking of you."

"You—you devil!"

He stiffened austerely. "That's enough abuse. You can go now. I'll expect you on Thursday."

Suddenly she raced past him, her hand out to catch the doll, but he was too quick for her. He slapped her face brutally. "None of that! I said you could go. Now go—or—" He picked a pin out of his lapel.

Vanquished, she turned and went out. As he had promised, she was plagued by the pains. And on Thursday, when she went to him, he had requested all her pay.

"But I need something for myself!" she cried.

He handed her a five-dollar bill. "If you need more, you'll have to borrow from some one," he told her.

SHE visited a doctor, who diagnosed her pains as nerves, and gave her a mild sedative. Every two weeks she was forced to turn over most of her salary to Bogrow. His tortures had transformed her into a wraith who was startled by every sound, every quick motion. At last she could bear it no longer. She bought a gun in a pawn shop. "Going to shoot your husband?" the shop keeper asked facetiously.

She tried to laugh. "No, but it's an idea. I thought, with this war scare—you know."

He nodded. "You'll feel safer with a gun in the house. Yeah, I know." He handed her a slip of paper and a pen. "You'll have to sign here, lady, we got to keep a record of purchases."

Her hand trembled as she wrote her name. "Okay," the shop keeper took the pen and paper. She slipped the revolver into her purse.

Bogrow was not in his studio. She crouched in the shadows beyond his door and waited, shaking. At last she heard him coming up the steps. Her legs shook so that she had to sit down on the floor. She took the gun from her bag and held it ready, but it wobbled in her tremulous hands.

Bogrow whistled a happy tune as he climbed the steps. Then he was in sight. She aimed the gun, her mouth twitching, but she could not fire. "No," she said wryly. "I can't shoot."

She had whispered the words, but Bogrow had heard her. He rushed to her, seized her hands and dragged her to her feet. "A gun! You were going to shoot me!" He jerked her hands and the re-

volver clattered over the stairway's railing, thudding down the steps.

"I wanted to," she said, choking. "But I couldn't."

His face was hard as a statue's. Then he relaxed. He contrived a little laugh. "No, of course you couldn't. You're too gentle a girl. Well, go on now, get out of here. I'll push a few pins into your image just to show you that you musn't think of things like this."

Her eyes were wide with horror. "Oh, no, Maksim, please."

"Oh, yes, Eileen. You must be taught your lesson. Go on now." He pushed her toward the stair. She stood looking at him in dumb appeal, and he turned, unlocked his door and stalked in.

Dreading the advent of the pains, she stumbled down the steps. Her foot struck the gun, and she bent down, retrieved it, unconsciously put it back into her purse. There were no pains. "Oh, why doesn't he do it and get it over with?" she wailed.

The streets were dark. It was late, and there was little traffic. Ahead was a bridge, and she started across it, halting to look down at the black water. She was not aware that a man was approaching. Still there was no pain. She looked down at her wrist watch. It was nearly midnight. The pains usually came then. Well, they would come no longer! She opened her purse, reluctantly drew out the revolver and eyed it with a shudder. Then she lifted it slowly to point at her temple. Her finger found the trigger . . .

The sound of hurried feet startled her, and she half turned to see who was coming. A strong hand jerked the gun away, and an arm wrapped around her, preventing her from running. "No, you don't!" a man's voice muttered urgently. "Here, let go of that gun!" He wrenched it from her hand. As she opened her mouth to scream, he clapped a hard palm over it. "Don't yell—I'm not going to hurt you."

She relaxed slightly, and his grip slackened. "All right," he said reassuringly. "I'll let you go now, if you won't do anything foolish."

She leaned back against the railing of the bridge, her hands pressed to her face. The man patted her arm sympathetically. "Things get difficult at times," he said gently. "I know."

When she had stopped trembling, she looked up at him. "Thank you. I suppose I was foolish. But there didn't seem to be anything else to do." He was not much taller than she, but there was strength in his stockiness. His shoulders were broad. It was too dim to see his face, but she sensed that it was kindly.

THE gun was in his hand; he looked at it, clucked his tongue, and tossed it over the railing down into the river. There was a faint distant splash. "Now tell me what it was about," the man said. "Maybe I can help you."

"I must go home," she said. "It may start at any time—the pain."

"The pain?" His voice was anxious. "You'd better let me go along with you to be sure that you're all right. I'm perfectly harmless—you needn't be afraid of me. I'm just a lonely bookworm, nothing more."

His apparent strength accentuated her weakness. She began to sob. "Here," the man said gently, "that won't do." He whipped a handkerchief out of a breast pocket and dabbed it on her eyes. Like a child, she permitted the gesture.

"Thank you," she said. "I can get ome by myself. You've been very helpful."

"Not yet. I'm going with you. We'll take a taxi if we can find one. While we're looking for one, you can tell me your troubles. I'm a good listener. I suppose it's the usual thing—you came to the Big City to go on the stage—" She

shook her head dejectedly. "By the way, my name's Dave Walsh. And you?"

"I'm—Eileen Williams. No, I wasn't trying to get on the stage. I have a job in a record store. You won't believe me when I tell you that I wanted to die because of—witchcraft—"

"Witchcraft?" He stopped stock still.

"Yes. You won't believe me. But I'd like to tell you. I'd like to tell somebody. I feel so helpless and alone—and any moment the pain will start, and I think I'll go mad—"

"The pain?" He was silent, taut with concern. "Here, we'll get a taxi first, and then you tell me."

IN THE taxi, she told her story. He listened patiently, not interrupting. "I've read about that sort of thing, but I never believed it. I can't say that I believe it now—the witchcraft part. I think the man's been hynotizing you into thinking he's got some kind of power over you. I'd like to pay him a visit. I'd soon find out."

"If you tried to take the doll, he'd harm it in some way—and hurt me!"

He considered. "Yes, I suppose so. Granting that the witchcraft slant is possible. I don't suppose that I ought to take the chance." He frowned. "But I've got to do something!"

"Please don't go to him—I'm afraid he'll hurt me through the doll."

"But if I don't—he can go on hurting people for the rest of his life!" Suddenly he brightened. "Look—have you any wax in your apartment?" Her wagging head said no. "Well, we'll have to get some. There ought to be an all-night drug store open—we can get beeswax there."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to make a little wax image of you and put your hair in it—everything your artist did. Then we'll see if it's really witchcraft or not if I touch it with a pin. If it is, I know how to act. If it isn't, I'll go to see your artist and beat him to a hash."

She was very pretty, despite her paleness, as she eyed him. "Are you sure you know what to do?"

"Sure I'm sure. You'll see. Come on, now—we'll have to find a drug store." He leaned forward. "Cabbie—!"

They rode the elevator up to her apartment, the package of wax bulging from Dave Walsh's pocket. As they stepped inside and Eileen snapped on a light, she whipped her hands up to her face and huddled down, moaning. Dave reached down to her and assisted her to her feet. "Here, what's the matter?"

Her teeth were clamped tightly; through them she muttered. "It's come—the pain!"

He led her to the nearest chair and pressed her gently down to it. He crouched at her side, his forehead wrinkling. After a long moment she dropped her hands. "It's over. If only it doesn't come back! He plays with me—I don't know what to expect—sometimes I go nearly mad waiting for the next torture to begin—!"

"You feel all right?"

"A little weak, but all right otherwise."

"Where's the kitchen?" She led the way. "Put on the gas," Dave said, "while I unwrap this wax." She obeyed. "Now get a scissors and cut off a bit of your hair and a piece of finger nail—and here, you'd better kiss the wax. We'll do everything just as he did it."

She watched curiously while he twisted off a bit of warm wax and moulded it. "You bought far too much wax," she said.

"Maybe. Run me some water from the tap, please." While she was at the sink he palmed the hair and finger nail, slipping them into his pocket. The doll was ready. He baptized it in her name. "Now watch!" He jabbed the doll with the scissors. She screamed and clapped a

palm to her forehead. "Now don't tell me that you really felt anything!"

She was uncertain. "I don't know—I thought I did."

"But you really didn't. I know, because the charm wasn't complete," As she stared wonderingly, he dipped into his pocket and brought out the hair and finger nail. "You see? I didn't even put your hair and the nail into the wax."

She looked. "Then I only imagined the pain!"

"Sure," he said cheerfully. "It's all a state of mind. The witch doctors in Africa do it by showing their prospective victim the doll. He's scared silly by what they intend to do and imagines pain that doesn't exist—he scares himself to death. All witchcraft works that way."

"Then you don't believe that any of my personality went into the doll that Maksim made? I didn't then—I was too smug —but now I'm not quite sure. They say that each person has a vibration, and that the vibration lingers in the person's clothing, in the rooms he frequents—"

"Nonsense," he said. "I'll show you."

He pressed the hair and nail into the doll, and baptized it again. "Now it's the same as your artist's doll, isn't it? All right." He jabbed the scissors into it.

Was it her imagination—or really witchcraft? She screamed insanely, raised both her hands as though to stop him, and fell fainting. He dropped the little wax figure and lifted her from the floor, carried her to the sofa by the front door. She was still breathing, but she looked dead. He stood over her, shaking his head incredulously.

"But it can't be true—it can't be!" He was silent. He clenched his hands. "But if it is—!" He went out to the kitchen and studied the little doll.

When Eileen recovered consciousness, Dave was standing over her. "How do you feel?"

She stirred, then sat up briskly. "Wonderful! I can't remember ever feeling better. It seems as though all the flowers in the world are blooming around me—I can even smell them." She looked around, sniffing the air. "I can't see any flowers, but can't you smell them!"

"No. But I'm glad you're better. Come, now. I want you to take me to where this Maksim lives. We'll go in a taxi."

She winced. "Oh, no, not to Maksim's!"

"He can't hurt you any longer. Trust me. You won't have to see him. You can wait in the street while I talk to him." His earnest eyes convinced her.

"Well, all right. But it's terribly late."

"Two A. M. But it's not too late. The sooner we see him, the better. Come, get into your coat."

THEIR taxi stopped. "You're sure this is the place?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. She peered out and upward fearfully. "His light's on.

"Oh, Dave—don't go up. Please don't. I feel that something terrible is going to happen!"

"Nothing's going to hurt you—I promise it." He opened the door. "Wait in here. I'll be down soon."

She leaned back on the padded seat, but she did not relax. He stepped out, slammed the car door, and entered the old building. The steps were very dark. At last he reached the studio and rapped on the door. A voice called, "Who is it?" He did not reply. After a moment, there was a sound of approaching feet; the door opened. Maksim Brogrow looked out, silhouetted against the light in his room, a gaunt scarecrow. "You? And you are who?"

"I'd like to have a little talk with you—about some wax dolls," Dave said.

Bogrow's outline tensed. He was like a tall marionette whose strings had been

suddenly jerked. "I don't know you. You cannot come in." He started to close the door, but Dave lunged forward, pushed forcefully past the artist and entered. "I said, you cannot come in!" Bogrow's voice flitted to a nervous squeak. "Get out! Get out!"

Dave's eyes swept the dirty little room. "I've come to get the doll you made of Miss Eileen Williams," he said.

Threat melted away from Bogrow like a coating of wax. He crouched, apparently submissive, but his eyes were guileful. "I'll get it for you." He shuffled forward.

"And no funny business—or I'll knock your head off!" Dave warned. Bogrow did not reply: he opened the door of a grimy cupboard and reached in for something. He whirled, the doll in his hand. "Keep away!" he cried shrilly. "I have the doll—yes! But you come a step nearer and I'll break it. If you want the doll, you must know what that means. She dies!"

Dave regarded him passionlessly. "Go ahead. Break it. But she won't die. Your little trick, whatever it is, won't work."

The artist laughed scornfully, shaking back the hair from his forehead. "You think not? Then you don't know the power that lies in this little image." He held it high. "You probably think of this as—only superstition. But I tell you that it is more! I have proved it! The soul resides in the body—yes? You must admit that. Parts of Eileen Williams' body are in this doll, giving it a soul—her soul. It is not for nothing that the Moslems believe it impossible to enter their heaven unless their bodies are whole. Why? Because without whole bodies, they cannot own complete souls. That is why they wear beards, do not cut their hair—they *know!* And I know!"

He lowered the doll, smiling slyly. "I have proved it! I have made many of these little effigies—and they gave me power. And now I say to you—go! I will not give up this doll." He waved toward the door. "Go! And never return!"

Dave hesitated, then started toward him with slow, deliberate steps. Bogrow backed away, clutching the doll. "I warn you—come a step nearer, and I break the doll!"

"Break it!" Dave said. "That won't stop me. You think you'll kill her. Well, the part of her you'll kill is the part of her that submitted to you, and that's better off dead. But it won't keep me from laying my hands on you!"

He advanced to within arm's length—his hands shot out. Perhaps it was intentional, or perhaps the artist's nervous fingers closed unthinkingly over the little figure. It snapped in his grasp, and he looked down at the hand in horror. It fell lax; the bits of wax scattered to the floor. That did not stop Dave. He gripped the man by the shoulders and dragged him across the room. The artist tried to shout for help, but his voice choked in his throat. Suddenly he sagged; Dave dropped him, and he lay grasping on the floor, his face waxenly white. He put a hand to his breast. "My heart—my hear—"

Dave stood over him as he lay, his face contorted in anguish. Then his breathing became normal; he lifted his head. "You dare not strike me. I am a sick man. I might die."

Dave bent and pulled the man on his feet. "No, I don't need to strike you. First I want you to see that your magic's harmless. Eileen is not dead. She's down in a car, waiting for me. Come to the window. I'll call her. You'll see."

Bogrow hung on to him as they went to the window. Dave drew up the sash and peered down. "Eileen!" he called, his voice echoing through the silent streets. He waited, but there was no reply.

"Eileen!" The taxi was small below, like a shiny insect.

A rear door opened; Eileen peered out. "Dave! Did you call?" Bogrow started at the sound of her voice; he leaned over the window ledge, goggling.

"It's all right. I just wanted to say I'll be down in a minute," Dave called. Eileen drew her head back into the taxi. Dave straightened. "You see?" he asked, jubilantly. "I spoiled your charm. And now—" He grasped the artist's arm.

Bogrow cringed. "What are you going to do with me? Don't strike me! My heart—"

Dave laughed contemptuously. "No, I won't hit you. I'm going to do something that you'll think is far worse. This!" His hand darted to Bogrow's head and plucked a hair from it. He hurried over to the remains of Eileen's doll, picked up a fragment. He returned to Bogrow and pushed the wax against the artist's mouth. "There. Now I have material for making a doll of you—if I should decide it's necessary." He pulled down the window. Bogrow drooped, his eyes staring dazedly. "In a way, I'm sorry for you. Circumstances forced you into this. But you had no right to meddle with people's lives by force." He pocketed the wax and the hair. "Bogrow, I am going to make a doll of you—perhaps. When you heart hurts—you'll never be sure that it's really your heart. It may be a pin in a little wax doll." He started for the door. "Good night, and good-by."

"Wait! Please!" The artist staggered after him. "Do not make the doll! I must live! I have so much important work to do." He gestured wildly at his canvases. "I am a genius—I must give my work to the world!"

"I'm not saying," Dave said, at the door. "Good night." He went out, closing the door quietly. Bogrow stared after him. Then, intense pain twisting his face, he clutched his heart—

ON THE stair, Dave smiled ruefully and tossed away the bit of wax and the hair. He went down to Eileen. She put out anxious hands to him. "It's all right? Once, while you were up there—just before you called down to me—I had the strangest sensation—as though part of me had died! But it was a part of me that I wanted to die—a smug and unforeseeing Eileen."

"You feel no pain?"

"Oh, no. I still feel happy and healthy. I can still smell the flowers. What did you do?"

He gave her address to the driver. As the car started away, he said, "I'll show you when you're home again. Eileen, we've known each other only for a night, but it seems like years. May I see you again—and possibly again after that?"

She laid her hands gratefully on his. "Yes, Dave."

"You think I've done something for you—but you'll be doing something for me. You can't know how lonely I've been. All I've had was my books, and once in a while, a stray dog to care for. If I hadn't seen you tonight—" He gestured futilely. "I might have gone on being lonely forever."

In her apartment, he ushered her to the linen closet and opened the door. "Here's how I neutralized Bogrow's spell. I figured that if one tortured doll could cause you pain, another lying peacefully would cut the pain in half. While you were unconscious, I took more of your hair and mixed it in the extra wax. See?" He put out a peremptory hand.

Eileen peeped into the closet. On a neat stack of scented linens lay six little waxen dolls.

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Meet the Dragon. . . . The incredible story of a man who was bequeathed a dragon's egg and thinks the whole affair is very funny —until the egg hatches into a fabulous fire-breathing monster. **THE EAGER DRAGON** is introduced to us by **Robert Bloch** with grotesque results.

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Starting the new year WEIRD TALES presents a thrill-packed issue you won't want to miss. January Issue on sale November 1st.

Robert Bloch

ROBERT BLOCH, who has introduced us to many a pleasant little character in the past (witches, sorcerers, innumerable corpses and Satan himself), came across with a somewhat different type of story in *Nursemaid to Nightmares*. It might be, as a fan suggested in a letter to us a while back, that Mr. Bloch's terrifying stories began to terrify Mr. Bloch himself. Anyway, Bloch decided to let death take a bit of a holiday and *Nursemaid* was the result. Another story of something the same type by the "reformed" Robert Bloch will appear in the January issue. It is entitled *The Eager Dragon;* and rates as about the craziest comic-relief to horror we've seen. Oh, and one more word before you read the letter below. Don't expect too much of a change in Mr. Bloch. We suspect that the author will be killing characters off with his usual gusto and imagination before long:

If the typing on the manuscript of *Nursemaid to Nightmares* was a little shaky, blame it on the fact that my hands trembled when I thought of doing a WEIRD TALES yarn with a humorous background. Ever since January, 1935, I've put my name on gory allegories—and I almost felt guilty of cheating my readers (both of them) by fanning out a fantasy where scarcely a dozen people get killed.

Frankly, though, *Nursemaid to Nightmares* is the kind of thing I've always wanted to do—much in the manner of the late esteemed Thorne Smith. About a year ago I began a regular series of screwball sagas in another magazine—but tucked away in the back of my head under all the maggots was this pet idea of mine for WEIRD TALES.

So I gritted my teeth at last and wrote it up. It may help to clear up some of those malicious rumors about me. This vicious gossip that I am a fiend in more or less human form is utterly incorrect. I have *never* strangled anyone with my bare hands. Always use gloves, because of fingerprints. The only time I ever tasted human flesh was during a wrestling match when I accidentally chewed off a man's arm. As a matter of fact, I am really a very loveable person, as my friends tell me—or they would, if I had any friends. Deep down underneath it all I have the heart of a small boy. I keep it in a jar, on my desk.

Seriously, you know, we fantasy writers are a pretty normal gang, after all. Suppose for a moment that you had a roomful of WEIRD TALES authors in your own parlor; let us say, August W. Derleth, Henry Kuttner, C. L. Moore, Fritz Leiber, Jr., Earl Peirce, E. Hoffmann Price, and myself.

Just what would you see? A group of witches and warlocks? Not at all. If you didn't know them by name you'd say, "Here's a football player (Derleth), a junior executive (Kuttner), a pretty girl (Moore), an actor (Leiber), an interne (Peirce), a lawyer (Price), and Gawd knows what that is (Bloch)."

At least, that's the way the gang looks to me. Perfectly normal, perfectly harmless. Of course, after midnight they change—but we don't talk about that.

Because after all, writing fantasy is a job, like any other. I do advertising copy, radio script, political ghost-writing, humor, and

fantasy. When *Nursemaid to Nightmares* was produced, I merely stacked forty-seven sheets of cheap white paper at the side of a cheap typewriter, slammed in a new ribbon, and began to bat it out in Stravinsky's wildest tempo. There's no secret. All you need is the paper and the ink. A four-year-old child could do it. As a matter of fact, I'm thinking of hiring one just for that purpose.

Anyhow, as author to reader, I offer a public apology for doing a chuckler instead of a groaner—but I hope you like it. Because there are a few more such notions tucked away for future reference. Horror and humor are, after all, closely allied—meeting often on the common plain of the grotesque. So I'll await your verdict on whether future tales will be grim or for grins.

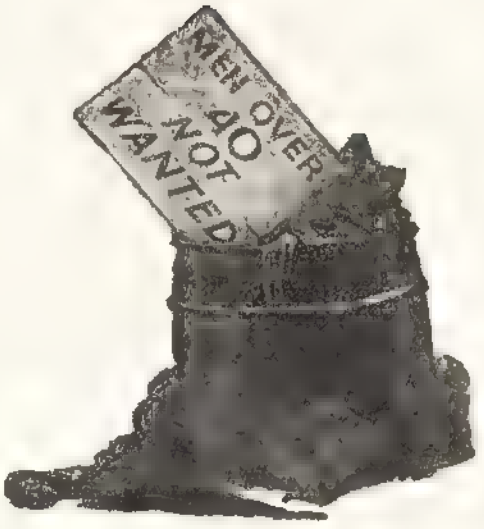
Just a word now, about fan letters. Naturally, I enjoy them. But there's one guy I must publicly warn right now. You see, he happens to be a ghoul. And while I like his notes very much, I can never manage to read them. Being a ghoul, he always eats the body of the letter.

Robert Bloch

Our Prolific Authors

WE LIKE to think that it was the success of his first fantasy yarn, published over ten years ago in WEIRD TALES Magazine, that helped launch Clark Ashton Smith on a successful writing career in this type of fiction. That first tale was *The End of the Story* and it appeared in the May, 1930, issue of our magazine. Imagine our interest to find this same story the first in a collection of Mr. Smith's work, got together in book form by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, just published by Arkham House and entitled "Out of Space and Time."

You veterans of WEIRD TALES may recognize some of the stories in this book. Many of them first saw the light of day right here between these covers. Mr. Smith, one of our best-liked and prolific story-spinners, has proved himself a master of the macabre, the fantastic and the pseudo-scientific. "Out of Space and Time" answers the demand for a handy collection of the author's best-liked stories. We enjoyed the book and we think you will.



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WT's Contribution to Fiction

Franklin J. Owen, Jr., secretary of the Bronx County Chiropractic Society, writes us:

I was happy to read a new "de Grandin" story in the May issue. Quinn has created in Trowbridge and de Grandin a pair like Holmes and Watson . . . just as real and with as much *permanent* appeal. After all is said, many characters of fiction are as real—in some cases more real!—than people who actually have lived. . . . Robin Hood, Robinson Crusoe, Nick Carter, the Necronomicum of Al Hazred, Gans T. Fields's Judge, are all of this type and it is interesting to note that W. T. has actually contributed to fiction some characters that will live as long as people write . . . and read fiction.

There is no doubt that Seabury Quinn is a master craftsman and he is the man who *definitely* has inherited the mantle of O'Henry; that is a strong statement . . . but . . . his stories of New York City are those of one who not only *knows* and loves New York . . . but . . . *KNOWS* its soul. True, many people live in New York, love New York . . . but . . . *few ever KNOW* New York; Seabury Quinn *DOES*.

Your Frank Owen is a teller of beautiful tales; in fact, his work is all too infrequent. Lovecraft is slightly overrated but good; Bloch is usually good. But Quinn is tops.

With best wishes for your continued success.

Husband and Wife Affair

Kuke Nichols, author of *Eyes of the Panther* in the September WEIRD TALES, is the husband of Betsy Emmons, whose story *Ghost of the Model T* appears in this issue.

Likes to See Hero on Spot

I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for the last two years and I must admit, yours is a very good magazine. WT excels in sheer enjoyment and suspense. As you know a soldier has a lot of time on his hands, which makes me appreciate WT more and more. How about more stories with a psychological twist? I like to read stories where everything doesn't come out quite right for the hero or heroine!

Pvt. Angelo P. Navagato
302nd C. A. Bln. Bar. Bu.
Battery B, Camp Davis, N. C.

From Artist into Author

MOST readers of WEIRD TALES know Hannes Bok's illustrations; they have commented on them for some time—generally

enthusiastically. So you can imagine our feelings the day Hannes came into the office and announced that he was through with ART; he was going to be a writer—or a section hand—or something like that. We remonstrated; we said he was much more useful to us as an illustrator; we said we liked his pictures, how did we know we'd like his stories?

Well, the answer to that is that we have used two of them—the second one being *The Evil Doll* in this issue. Of course, Hannes so far broke down as to draw the head for it, but the story, after all, is the thing. We thought that Bok ought to tell the readers of WT of his metamorphosis from artist to author, so we asked him to. What did we get? The following letter, so we think you'll have to draw your own conclusions:

My mother claims that the first thing I did after being born was to eat. (A slur at my appetite.) Second, she says I picked up a pencil and began to draw—but I think that's a *little* far-fetched. My earliest memories are of writing. At the age of nine I wrote action stuff of the type that I liked to read, but didn't seem available in print. I remember one episode: my hero, Don Denver, was riding a motorcycle in pursuit of bandits. They crashed through a "detour" sign and drove safely over a bridge. Not so our hero. He chased 'em on over the bridge, and right when he was in the middle—boom! A road gang (oblivious to the traffic) blew the bridge up. Was our hero killed? Not at all. He landed on a freight train's box car and when the train reached a crossing (where the bandit auto was delayed) he jumped off the train and beat up the villains. Nice? I wish I knew what the rest of the story was.

I don't like drawing much except for the making of fantastic pictures. I enjoy making huge landscapes of scenes on Mars and the moon. Have two 3 by 4 foot panels just begging to be painted upon, but at present I'm interested in a story.

Had an idea for doing a fantasy entirely in pictures. A magazine considered it, then decided that it would be too expensive. But I'd still like to do it. (Hint.) It'd be about thirty-four full-page pictures and thirty-eight half-page ones, without captions, which wouldn't be necessary.

Thanks again for letting me do an *Eyrie*

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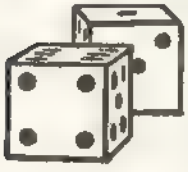

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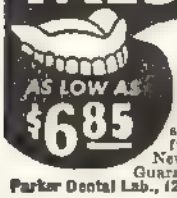

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letter; am waiting eagerly for appearance of the story in print. Then I'll run around showing it to everybody, my chest expanding till—like the frogma in the Aesop fable—I'm ready to bust!

Wei-ir-rd!!

From Chicago, Ill., Arthur J. Schlenz writes:

I am taking this opportunity to congratulate the editors of WEIRD TALES magazine on the high qualities of the stories of their publication.

Since I have been buying WEIRD TALES, which is about two years, I think the last few issues have been the best.

In the July issue, especially, they were all good. The three stories I liked best were *Coven, Is the Devil a Gentleman?* and *For Tomorrow We Die.*

I also like the interesting letters that are written to the WEIRD TALES CLUB. But I miss the "It Happened to Me" department. I think Lovecraft is tops, but the installment of his story in your last issue was too short.

Here's hoping your stories get even more *weeirrd.* . . . (if that's possible!)

We're glad you readers liked Manly Bannister and his *Satan's Bondage,* in the September issue. This was Bannister's first accepted magazine story. We'll wager it won't be the last.

READERS' VOTE

NURSEMAID TO NIGHTMARES	THE GHOST OF THE MODEL T
THE HOUND	THE CANDLE
THE CROOKED HOUSE	THE LIPS OF CAYA WU
THE VICTORY OF THE VITA-RAY	HERBERT WEST: REANIMATOR
THE GOLDEN BOUGH	THE POSSESSED
	THE EVIL DOLL

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it into us.

WEIRD TALES
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WRITE to MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

• This is your club—a medium to help you get together with other fantasy and science-fiction fans. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

R. A. F. Likes Magazine

As an Englishman and here in Canada, to serve a period of at least three years with the Royal Air Force, I found myself at a loss for entertainment during the evenings, so I took to my old hobby, magazines. You can be sure after reading a couple of WEIRD TALES I placed a regular order with the local magazine store.

I would very much like to be placed on the membership roll, and to receive a membership card. If there should be any member, either male or female, who would like to consider me as a pen friend, well, just ask them to write; I'll reply to all letters.

I can assure you that W.T. magazine will be sent home regularly to my pal, who is in the R. A. F. in England.

Thanking you,

Sincerely yours,

W. P. Fellows

No. 623627, Sgt. W. P. Fellows,
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Infantryman Wants to Join

Please enroll me in the Weird Tales Club roster. I have been reading WEIRD TALES for more than ten years and, although I do not have much time in the U. S. Army, I do my best to read and keep up with the magazine. A great many new authors and artists keep coming up, most of them good.

I am enclosing a soldiers' mail envelope. Please forward my Membership Card in it.

Very truly yours,
Pvt. Steven Fogaris
Co. F., 306th Infantry
Fort Jackson, S. C.

Thoroughly Satisfied

I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for quite some time now. I can truthfully say that I enjoy WEIRD TALES more than any other fantastic magazine now being printed. Every story is original, exciting and has a superb ending. I compliment your authors for turning out such a varied collection of interesting stories. No amount of words or praise is too great for this magazine.

Please enroll me in your club.

Yours sincerely,
Patricia Ebner
440 Fourth Street, Braddock, Pa.

Reader Would Like to Correspond

I have been a fan of WEIRD TALES for about the last five years, and would like to join your Weird Tales Club. I have read quite a number of magazines pertaining to the weird and fantastic. As yet I haven't found one that can pass in superiority to WEIRD TALES. Your magazine has a kick to it that others lack. I would welcome correspondence from other members of the club, and, if possible, to meet them personally. Wishing you the best of luck.

Respectfully yours,
Karl Gress, Jr.
107 West Forty-seventh Street
New York City.

Black Magic

I am very interested in Black Magic and my main hobby is collecting formulas that are or were supposed to be used in conjuring the devil or other residents of Hell. If you happen to have any stray formulas around please write. I am always glad to pick up any pen pals who happen to be interested in these same subjects.

Your friend,
Rodney Lee Stimson
17 Beacon Avenue, Auburn, Maine.

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Hannah A. Jones, Box 807, White Plains, N. Y.
David Rogers, Quincy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.
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Walter E. Buckley, 155 Hynes Ave., Groton, Conn.
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Alvin Cohar, 621 Warren St., Hudson, N. Y.
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Maurice D. Surratt, Camp Shelby, Miss.
Robert W. Cloutier, 150 St. Botolph St., No. 3, Boston, Mass.
John Haaren, 15 Woodbine Ave., Larchmont, N. Y.
Frank Stevenson, 18 Stokes St., Port Arthur, Ont., Canada.
James R. Gallups, Apt. No. 4, 907—17th St. South, Birmingham, Ala.
Eddie Neitzel, 6003 Richmond Ave., Dallas, Texas.
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Keith Talboe, 419 E. 97th St., Ingelwood, Calif.
John Dusing, 2952 Second Blvd., No. 10, Detroit, Mich.
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Roy Andrich, 1028 Maple St., Inglewood, Calif.
Michael Pelsang, 309—65th St., West New York, N. J.
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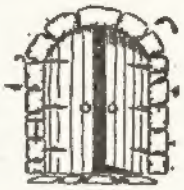

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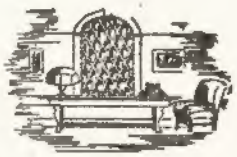

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